

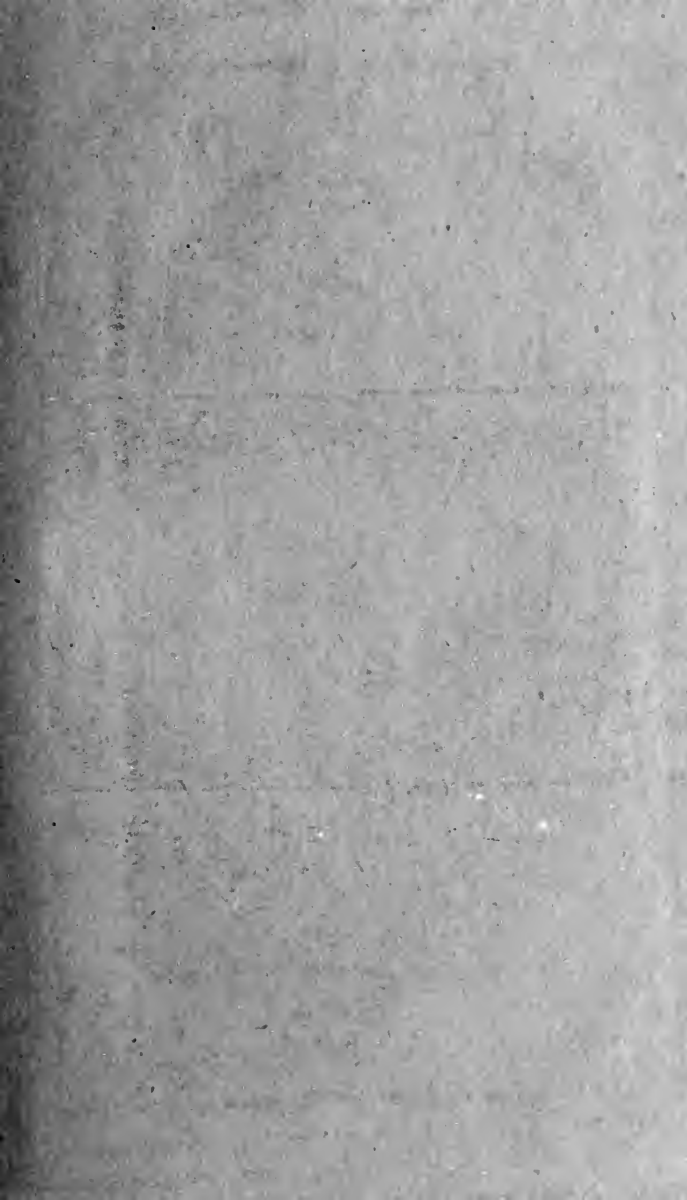
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# MODERN UNBELIEF:

## ITS PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS.

### SIX ADDRESSES

BY

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LONDON:

THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE COMMITTEE OF THE  
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE;

SOLD AT THE DEPOSITORIES:

77, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS;

4, ROYAL EXCHANGE; 48, PICCADILLY;

AND BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

NEW YORK: POTT, YOUNG, AND CO.

1877.

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## PREFACE.

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VERY few words are needed by way of introduction.

The pages that follow will speak for themselves, and the circumstances under which they were written will account for the general tenor of the whole. Each Address forms the second part of a Charge delivered to the clergy of an archdeaconry.

The language is thus such as would naturally be used to an audience composed of those who have to teach and direct others; the arguments and illustrations such as might supply suggestions and lines of thought to men whose professional studies have long made them familiar with the general subject. This little volume thus pretends to be no more than it

is,—a Charge delivered in the ordinary performance of one of the graver duties of a responsible office. It is not directly designed to convince those who might be in doubt, or to confute by any elaborate arguments those who might be opposing the truth of Christianity, but is intended to act by way of suggestion, and generally to supply some guidance amid the various and changing phases of modern thought. It has been, in a few places, slightly modified with some reference to the larger circle of readers to which now, by the kind wish and request of the Venerable Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, it will be introduced in its present form.

Still it remains substantially the same as it was originally written and delivered. Productions designed for one purpose are sure to suffer if they are modified with the hope of making them available for another and different purpose. The present volume thus does not pretend to be a popular treatise, or a series of controversial lectures, but simply a few connected addresses designed to touch gravely the



salient points in a great controversy. It is and remains a Charge to clergy, yet now so far expanded, by the addition of notes, as possibly to be of some little use to the general reader.

To the general reader, then, this little volume is now commended, with the solemn prayer to Almighty God, that it may be permitted to be of some passing aid to those that may doubt, to minister reassurance to those that may be anxious, and in all who may read these pages—pages written in no bitter or controversial spirit—may deepen love to Christ Jesus, our only and redeeming Lord.

C. J. GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL.

Palace, Gloucester,  
December 27, 1876.



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# THE PREVALENCE OF UNBELIEF.

[DELIVERED AT GLOUCESTER, OCTOBER 24TH, 1876.]

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It seems to be impossible for any thoughtful person to contemplate the various aspects now presented to us by the Church and the world without strangely mingled feelings of hope and encouragement on the one side, and of fear and anxiety on the other. When we consider the general nature and amount of the Christian work now, by the blessing of God, carried on by the Church of England, we seem certainly to recognize much that may properly give us distinct and hearty encouragement. Not only from what you have already heard,<sup>1</sup> but from all we may generally know

<sup>1</sup> It may be here noticed that the present and the succeeding Addresses formed, in each case, the *second* portions of the Charge, as it was originally delivered. The first part, in each case, was devoted to the local Church work of the Archdeaconry or Deanery, and to a comparison

of the spiritual progress of our National Church, we seem to have full reason for humbly believing that the Holy Ghost is now vouchsafing to quicken the hearts of pastors and people more perhaps than at any time that could be specified since the great days of our English Reformation. Whether we contemplate the more limited area of an Archdeaconry or a Diocese, or form our estimate from the wider survey of the Province, or of the Church of England generally, we certainly seem to recognize the same marks of progress, the same tokens of a fuller and fresher life. Everywhere, thank God, there seems to be greater earnestness and a deeper sense of responsibility; everywhere onward movement; everywhere increased energy. Restored churches, warmer services, more ready co-operation in our congregations, Church-life more realized, Church-work more diffused,—all bear abundant witness to the certain truth that religion is becoming more felt to be a reality, and being so felt is—we may thankfully observe—more acted on throughout the whole wide area of that Church of which we have the blessing and the responsibility to be minis-

of it with the work of former periods. This first part, under the present circumstances of the publication of the Charge, is necessarily omitted.

ters. Hope and encouragement are certainly very fully vouchsafed to us at the present time.

If this, however, be true, on the one hand, it is as certainly true, on the other, that unbelief, and that too of a kind which demands our most anxious attention, has been silently advancing and spreading throughout all classes, and especially among the educated and cultivated. Unwelcome as it ever is to admit the fact, it yet now seems forced upon our observation. With the light there has also come the shadow. Light there is, fuller and brighter light than perhaps has ever before dawned upon us; yet shadows there are, stealing and deepening shadows of sceptical and irreligious thought, which are now startling and disquieting all serious observers of the times in which we are living. Such shadows, however, have been foreseen by many, and cannot in any sense be said now to have come over us unawares. The germs of the unbelief of the present were clearly enough to be seen in the free thought and scepticism of the past.

It is now as much as twelve years ago (if I may allude for one moment to myself in this matter) that I ventured to point out, in this very place, and in the discharge of the very duty which I am now attempting to perform,

the silent approach of that which then seemed far, far in the background. I said, if I remember rightly, that there were, even then, baleful and ominous signs that the frightful development of Antichristian error which is summed up not only in the denial of the Son but of the Father was far more rapidly approaching maturity than was at all commonly supposed. I alluded to these signs, and I directed attention, as far as I was able, to the nature of the current speculations of those times, as suggesting the probability of a steady lapse into man's last and worst denial—the denial of the personality of his Maker, and of the adorable Fatherhood of God.<sup>2</sup> These warnings, I well remember, were considered as unreasonable and exaggerated. It was said

<sup>2</sup> See *Primary Charge*, pp. 99, 100 (Gloucester, 1864). At that time the personality of God was called into question, mainly on the same grounds as at present, viz., that the very idea of personality limits and circumscribes that which must be, by the very definition, illimitable (p. 100),—but the doubts were not then formulated with the sharpness with which now they are set forth (see, for example, Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 408, seq.), and had to be recruited by arguments from other quarters. These are noticed in the passage referred to, and are specified as “intimations of the gradual and silent approach of man's last and uttermost impiety,—the denial of the personality of his Maker.”—*Charge*, p. 100.



at the time that this was only a passing phase of modern thought, and that the opinions and speculations to which such works as Essays and Reviews had given considerable force and currency would gradually disappear, and be soon succeeded by the healthier forms of thought which for a time, but only for a time, they had succeeded in displacing. Such opinions, it was urged, had always existed, had often been expressed, and yet, in the sequel, had fled away and left the substance of *credenda* the same as ever, the deposit of Faith undiminished and unchanged.

Is it so, however? Can we now say with any correctness that there has been any change for the better, in reference to unbelief, during the twelve years that have passed away? Has current opinion given any indications which might lead any of us to think that the amount of unbelief is diminishing, or that its direction is in any degree changing for the better? Do we observe it less frequently in our current literature? Is it found less persistently associated with the real or supposed developments of modern science? Does it less transpire in popular historical criticism; or is its influence, so far as we can judge, waning in the general context and tendencies of modern society?

As we well know, the state of the case is utterly the reverse. Not only are scepticism and unbelief far more general and avowed, but their characteristics are seriously changed, in some aspects perhaps for the better, yet in their ultimate effects very distinctly for the worse. Unbelief is changed for the better in having some sort of scope and theory, and in being, though hopeless and despairing, yet not without some sort of joyless earnestness. Whether, however, this be for the better or no, it seems quite clear that the unbelief that twelve years ago found popular expression in our current literature was very different in its tone to that which is now silently arraying itself against Christianity. Its tone was then often flippant and repulsive;<sup>3</sup> its attack petulant and desultory, and its appreciation of those deeper and more ultimate questions, in reference to man's position on the earth—his past and his future—which are now so eagerly discussed, utterly feeble and unattractive. It simply attempted to destroy without apparently any

<sup>3</sup> The language now used against Christianity by its opponents is, for the most part, free from the coarse invective that marked the attacks of an earlier date. There have been, however, of late, a few painful exceptions. An article last year in the *Fortnightly Review*, by Professor Clifford, reproduced language of a very repulsive character.

thought of ulterior reconstruction. It broke with the religion of the past, but never cared enough about religion in the abstract to contemplate the possibility of supplying the deep need, which all experience tells us does exist in the poor human heart, with something which might call itself the religion of the future. The scepticism of the more recent past was essentially negative in all its aspects. It did not seek to solve any problems, and concerned itself but little with any special theories. Its simple object was to show that what was generally received was untrustworthy. It rested in part on a literary, and in part on a metaphysical, basis. It attacked on the one hand the documents of Christianity, and, on the other, the leading doctrines and teaching of Christianity. The former, the documents, it endeavoured to show, were compiled long posterior to the times of which they professed to give a record; the latter, the general system of teaching, it boldly arraigned as a morally indefensible system, and as involving conceptions which, it alleged, were at variance with the higher convictions and experiences of the soul. The so-called "verifying faculty," as many of us here may very well remember, was that which was continually appealed to in

reference to the moral trustworthiness of Christian doctrine, and was always triumphantly assumed to be the sole and true arbitress in all biblical controversies.

The unbelief, however, of the present time is of a very different kind. Estimated simply with reference to its general tone and ethical characteristics, it is, so to speak, a much better article; though, as I have already said, its effects are much more dangerous, and the change, as far as regards its influence against the popular teaching of Christianity, very gravely for the worse. It is impossible for us to deny that unbelief is now assuming a much more earnest tone. It professes to take into consideration the gravest questions, to test the evidence on which our belief claims to rest, to suggest answers to all deeper questions that lie within the realm of the knowable, and where they lie beyond it, to make it clear that, with our present state of knowledge, no trustworthy answers can be given. And all this is, so to say, becoming public property. A few years ago the results, or supposed results, of modern science were not popularly known beyond the general circle of scientific men. The theory of Evolution, for example, appeared to be simply a scientific theory, more or less

probable, which professed to account for the aggregation or disposition of matter in the visible universe, but which in no way involved, as it is now declared to involve, the whole question of creation and even of a personal God.<sup>4</sup> The now celebrated law of Natural Selection appeared at first little more than an intelligent illustration of theories of development that had found acceptance in years gone by, and had perished from want of a sufficiently wide or accurate induction to keep them scientifically alive. Any unbelief that based itself upon such theories of course worked within a comparatively limited circle, and, if it found expression beyond it, won but little real acceptance. It claimed to rest upon what was then but little known, or if known, was deemed to be as yet only hypothetical and precarious.

And not only has unbelief thus become more widely diffused, but it has also met with an acceptance which never was accorded to the form of infidelity which it has, to a very considerable extent, displaced. The infidelity of

<sup>4</sup> "The doctrine of Evolution," says one of its most recent and not least able supporters, "is throughout irreconcilably opposed to the doctrine of creation, so that the establishment of the former is in fact synonymous with the overthrow and destruction of the latter."—Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 376, seq.

the earlier days of this last half-generation never obtained any real hold on the popular mind. It was welcomed and utilized by all minds of a sceptical bias, and it undoubtedly is not without some effect at the present time, as I shall endeavour hereafter to show ; still it has never exercised a very wide influence, and has never seemed to obtain any such hold on the general mass of moderately educated people as to cause any permanent anxiety. The laborious writings, for example, of Bishop Colenso have probably done as little real harm to the general belief in the truth and credibility of the Pentateuch as were done by any of the Rationalist writers of the earlier part of this century to the belief in the Gospel history. What has always neutralized the effects of such writers in this country is the thoroughly English feeling and sentiment that there is a great deal to be said on the other side—the kind of persuasion that if any able advocate were to state the case for the defence, fully and clearly, and cross-examine the charges made against Scripture, the opponents would probably be found to have made out but a poor case against the substantial truth of the documents they were attempting to impugn.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> There are few subjects which have been more unfortu-

In all merely literary scepticism there is never that kind of evidence which seems to work complete conviction. The mind may be interested and half-persuaded, but the soul, with its deeper sense of its own real difficulties and perplexities, never rests ultimately satisfied with what it instinctively recognizes as little more than skilful pleading and clever dialectics.

But it is very different with the unbelief of our own days. Its principles have been quietly spreading for some time, its influence developing, until at length the time seems now to have come when the whole question must be calmly faced, and when the prevalence and characteristics of our modern unbelief must be fully examined. In a certain sense there is nothing particularly new in these principles. They were silently working a dozen years ago,—and it was on the recognition of this that I ventured to speak as I then did speak,—but, as I have already said, their development was then

nately neglected by theologians than the general principles of the rules of evidence as applied to alleged facts and matters of detail. An excellent pamphlet on this subject may be here specified, viz., Forsyth, *On the Rules of Evidence as applicable to the Credibility of History* (Hardwicke, Lond. 1874); see also a sensible sermon by Dr. Reichel, *The necessary Limits of Christian Evidences* (Bel-fast, 1874).

slow, and the circle to which they were confined limited and scientific. Now they have unfolded; agreeable and versatile authors have presented them in attractive forms; the popular occupants of chairs of science have given them currency; writers in our periodicals are reproducing them in easy and readable articles; and the so-called educated public is reading them, and beginning to believe them, or, at any rate, lapsing into the persuasion that they have *some* claims on our attention. This sort of indolent lapse of opinion into what is really fundamentally opposed to all revealed religion is one of the serious signs of the last ten or twelve years. But matters do not end here. There is not only a latent freedom of thought, but a very unrestrained avowal of it. Scepticism is no longer confined to the closet and the study. Society no longer frowns upon and discourages it; nay, it does something more than merely give it a hearing.<sup>6</sup> Strange things

<sup>6</sup> Society certainly tolerates a looseness in regard of external religious observances, which seems year by year increasing. Our secular papers notice this, and sometimes bring it before us with a detail which we must fear is very often verified. It is only a few weeks since that there was an article in the *World* on the "Religion of Young Men," which no one of common observation could deny to be otherwise than telling and true. One of the



are now freely spoken; opinions that, a few years ago, would have produced a startle in cultivated society, are now ventilated without censure or protest, and are becoming tolerated, if even not approved and fostered.

I do not wish to be, in any form, a mere alarmist. I do not desire to specify these things merely to contribute to the already existing anxiety on the subject of modern thought. Nay, I am quite willing to admit that a great deal is said, and has been said, for which there is no sufficient evidence. Much has been said that cannot possibly be substantiated. Our Universities, for example, have been denounced as scarcely any longer places of really Christian education,<sup>7</sup> our younger public teachers have been

causes assigned by the writers is—The consciousness of unbelief.

<sup>7</sup> This charge which, it will be remembered, was publicly made two or three years ago, and excited at the time considerable attention, has not been, we may be thankful to feel, by any means fully substantiated. A very important witness on the other side (Rev. W. Ince, of Exeter College) demonstrated, in a clear and convincing paper, read before the Church Congress of last year, that the religious, or rather, irreligious state of Oxford was by no means what it had been described to be. All my resident friends at Cambridge on whose judgment I can rely give even a still more cheering account of the state of religious opinion in that University.

charged with an indifference to Christianity, if no worse ; even our leading public schools have not escaped the suspicions which, at an anxious time like our own, are suggested by well-meaning but not very accurately-informed criticism. With these outbursts of alarm I have no sympathy whatever ; they are founded on an imperfect appreciation of the real state of the case, and on a very inadequate knowledge of the present position of the great controversy. What I do feel, however, very distinctly is this ; that there is evidence, and evidence that cannot be set aside ;—First, that infidelity of a very serious kind—infidelity that claims to rest, not merely on metaphysical speculation or historical criticism, but on facts, and on science—is becoming popularly known, and even popularly accepted. Secondly, that all the evil results which attend on this sort of playing with fire are gradually disclosing themselves among the young and inexperienced. There is now a sort of dim feeling in many a young heart that old opinions are untenable, or, if to any extent tenable, that they will have to be totally reconstructed,—that the attack is overwhelmingly strong, and the defence very orthodox, but very weak,—and that it is quite an excusable, if not a commendable attitude to rely upon

what seems—yet only seems—to be sure and agreed upon, to cast out the four anchors of the soul—its hope, its faith, its reverence, and its love—on the old sand-bank of simple morality, and so to wait for or wish for the day.

If this be so, if there is everywhere increasing this sort of suspended belief, if principles which are really destructive of all heart-faith are slowly finding their way into our popular literature, if the tendency towards that worst of all states, believing nothing,<sup>8</sup> not even unbelief itself, is certainly increasing,—then it does seem our duty, my dear friends and brethren, to give our thoughts seriously to these things, to review carefully our position, to estimate fairly and calmly the nature and direction of the attack, and then in conclusion to turn our best attention to the exact state of the defence, and, where necessary, to supplement and strengthen it. Such an attempt may not un-

<sup>8</sup> This believing nothing is now elevated to the dignity of what we might have called, had it not been a misnomer, a definite creed. A clear and ably-written, though very painful defence of this system will be found in the *Fortnightly Review* for June of the present year. The tone of the whole article is sad, and, at times, bitter. The writer ought to have had sufficient regard for the feelings of others to have prevented him using many of the expressions which we find in the article. The consolations of Christianity are not the bitterest of mockeries (p. 841).

suitably form the subject of a Charge at the present time. There is a sort of lull in the miserable and pitiful controversies that have so long been forced upon us by restlessness and innovation. There is the homely English feeling showing itself everywhere that the law must be made quite clear, and when quite clear as clearly obeyed;—and there is the equally English willingness to remain quiet and patient till the highest Courts of our land tell us the true meaning of our formularies, and define for us the amount of liberty and ritual which is compatible with the rules and definitions of our Mother Church.

At such a time, then, it may not be unseasonable for us to avail ourselves of this interspace; to leave awhile the wearisome and unprofitable questions which have so long detained us, and to turn to that which is really serious and menacing,—the gradual and silent lapse, on the part of many who still loosely bear the name of Christians, into opinions which are simply incompatible with a true belief in the fundamental principles of Christianity, and are scarcely consistent with a belief in the blessed personality of God.

These opinions have been long masking themselves in various disguises, and asso-

ciating themselves with many popular forms of contemporary thought. Sometimes they have shown themselves in alliance with attacks upon the credibility of the early history of our race as set forth in the Old Testament. Sometimes they have become mixed up with the real or supposed difficulties of reconciling recent historical research with the generally accepted date of man's first appearance on the earth. Sometimes they have become associated with the now not uncommon protests against the morality of the Old Testament, and against the so-called Judaism of modern Christianity. Sometimes quite another ground is taken, and an appeal is made to recent discoveries of science, which disclose wholly different views on the laws and order of nature to those which are alleged to be the assumptions of theology. Scientific research, it is asserted, is tending more and more to obliterate the supernatural ; the idea of Creation has, it is urged, now to prepare to give way to evolution, and Providence to self-adjustment and development. Last of all, to close, though not to exhaust, a wearisome list, sometimes the opinions to which I have been alluding claim to occupy an utterly independent attitude, to swing free of all creeds, to accept evidence when

fairly verifiable, and then to stand at gaze, to allow a few watery hopes just to float across the dreary expanse, but really to believe nothing and to profess really to know nothing which cannot be tested and proved by direct investigation, or, at the very least, by the results of universal experience. Of this composite and mixed nature is much of that unbelief that is really doing most harm at the present time, and is most successfully predisposing our younger people at last to hold everything as opinionable, and ultimately to believe nothing. It may be ingenious and interesting to trace out the phases and causes of religious thought, and to specify the distinctive features of the various systems that are now emerging from the ferment of modern unbelief,—it may be ingenious, but it is totally profitless.<sup>9</sup> The worst forms of unbelief are those that have gathered their doubts from many systems, and rest upon

<sup>9</sup> A paper on this subject, entitled "The Courses of Religious Thought," will be found in the *Contemporary Review* for August of the present year. Like everything written by the accomplished author of the paper, it is clever and interesting; but it is deficient in a true grasp of the principles of several of the systems alluded to, and it places in the same list phases and forms of religious thought which, metaphysically considered, have scarcely the slightest connexion with each other. Great exactness of thought is required in the analysis of these protean systems.

the supposed cumulative evidence that Christianity cannot possibly be maintained in the face of existing difficulties.

To cut our way through such a jungle of tangled thoughts may be very difficult. Still, with a little patience, some high ground may, from time to time, be reached, from which a fair survey may be obtained of modern difficulties in reference to Revealed Religion, and a just estimate formed of their real validity. At any rate, if we can do nothing else, we shall, I trust, be enabled fairly to show the danger, as well as the unreasonableness, of maintaining that attitude of suspense which is now regarded as characteristic of all higher philosophic thought; and further, we shall, I hope, also be enabled to make it clear that there are broad considerations, both on the positive as well as on the negative side, which must cause every sober-minded thinker to pause seriously and anxiously before he merges his lingering hopes of the truth of Christianity in a barren and creedless Nescience.

Thus far, my dear friends, I have only generally broken ground in the subject now lying before us. The development and expansion of these thoughts must be reserved for the Addresses that will follow. What

I have now said has only been general and introductory. Its design, however, has been to bring home to you, without any exaggeration, and without any expressions of unreasonable alarm, the simple fact, that the words which form the title of this present Address, "The Prevalence of Unbelief," are not idly used, but do state that which a single glance into the popular literature of the day will abundantly verify. It may be easy enough to say, as is often said, that there are really no grounds for supposing that matters are now worse than they have ever been before; that there was quite as much infidelity in the days of Bishop Butler as there is now; that the present movement of modern thought is transitory, and is only prelusive to a reactionary return to the old and true principles of the Catholic faith. It is easy to say these things, but it is by no means easy to support them by satisfactory proofs. Infidelity, we well know, there has ever been, but it certainly has not been the form, or rather forms, of infidelity which are now confronting us. There may be now no greater amount of disbelief in revealed religion than there was in the days of Bishop Butler, but it is certainly a disbelief of a very different kind; for it begins with denying, on presumed



scientific evidence, that very truth which Butler and his opponents alike regarded as sufficiently established,<sup>1</sup> the existence of an intelligent Author of Nature, and of a moral Governor of the World.

I return then to my position—that there certainly do appear to be some grounds for fearing that unbelief, in a form very likely to do great mischief, especially to the young, is distinctly prevalent among us, and to an extent and degree that a few years ago could hardly have been anticipated. In the next Address I purpose, with God's help, to notice the causes that have led to this prevalence.

<sup>1</sup> The words of Bishop Butler on this subject are as follows:—After stating that he takes it for proved that there is an “intelligent Author of nature, and natural Governor of the world,” he adds, “For as there is no presumption against this prior to the proof of it; so it has been often proved with accumulated evidence from the argument of analogy and final causes, from abstract reasoning, from the most ancient tradition and testimony, and from the general consent of mankind. Nor does it appear, so far as I can find, to be denied by the generality of those who profess themselves to be dissatisfied with the evidence of religion.”—*Analogy of Religion*, Introduction, p. 6 (Oxford, 1864). It would be urged now that there *is* strong presumption prior to the proof; and writers like Hartmann would press that if in any degree Intelligence is to be traced in the structure of things around us, it is utterly unconscious of its own existence.

In the Addresses that follow I hope to notice successively, those characteristics of unbelief which have been only touched upon to-day; then further, some of the leading arguments, both against Unbelief, and for Christianity, and, lastly, the best practical methods of dealing with unbelief which it may seem desirable to adopt at the present time.

Much more might now be added, but I pray God that, at any rate, enough may have been said generally to quicken our thoughts, and to call forth our prayers that the Holy Spirit of power, and light, and love, may now be vouchsafed in fuller measure to the Militant Church, and that He may more and more stablish, strengthen, and settle all shaken and wavering Christian hearts.

Oh may that blessed Spirit be with us all! The days in which we live are dark and anxious. Deeper learning is, I fear, declining; patient criticism is rare; merely emotional belief is not uncommon; but real and instructed belief, that belief that can give the reason for the hope that is in it, and can exhibit clearly the basis of its own convictions, is less and less showing itself among generally professing Christians. Even we the clergy, we whose duty is to guide and direct others amid the

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mazes of modern speculation, we, I fear, are often found unequal to the duty that is now forced upon us. Everything now seems to be pressed into the service of external work. We may thank God that there *is* this amount of work, but work is superseding thought; a restless activity is now taking the place of much of that calm and sequestered study that once so honourably marked the order to which we belong. Much is there that is at present disquieting. Yet we know in whom we have trusted. We know that with His love in our hearts the lips *will* speak, and if they speak because His love prompts the words, let us be of good cheer, for such words will never be spoken in vain.

# THE CAUSES OF UNBELIEF.

[DELIVERED AT CHELTENHAM, OCTOBER 25TH, 1876.]

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IN my Address of yesterday I stated generally the subject on which I felt it my especial duty to speak at the present time,—existing unbelief, its nature and prevalence, and the best means of counteracting it. Without recapitulating what I then said, I may briefly notice that it was my object in that Address to place the subject generally before my hearers, and, more especially, to call attention to the distinct prevalence of that unbelief, or—to use the most guarded form of expression—of that non-belief, of which we have now so much melancholy evidence.

If I may now assume that the subject does demand our attention, and that even the most hopeful can hardly deny that an unbelief of

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the most grave and menacing character is now stealing into the hearts of the young and speculative—if I may assume this as generally substantiated yesterday, I may to-day not improperly invite your thoughts to the question that at once presents itself, and seems to stand next in the orderly development of our subject, “If this be so, why is it so?” To what causes or influences can we probably ascribe the apparent prevalence of suspended belief, and the increase of the difficulties in heartily accepting the facts and teaching of Christianity? It is obviously of vital importance to attempt to find some answer to this question. If the causes are only such as have always existed, the difficulties only the old difficulties, the arguments only those which have been successfully dealt with from the very first,—if this be so, our anxiety may be much modified. But if, on the other hand, the difficulties are substantially new, or, if old, so recruited by fresh arguments as to assume a form of novel cogency, then it becomes our duty to discuss the question anew, to endeavour to ascertain the causes which have contributed to the new developments, and then to proceed onward to notice the more distinctive characteristics of modern unbelief, and to investigate the general tenor of the

arguments on which it now claims principally to rest.

We may therefore properly devote the present Address to a brief investigation of the causes which have principally tended to the prevalence of existing unbelief.<sup>1</sup>

Of the many causes which may be assigned, there are three which seem to claim our more especial consideration,—the tone and direction of recent historical criticism, the deductions that have been drawn from the real or alleged discoveries of modern science, and the moral and metaphysical difficulties which have been

<sup>1</sup> The nature of the causes of unbelief was discussed at the recent Church Congress at Plymouth, but scarcely in a manner commensurate with the importance of the subject. The most noticeable feature of the discussion was the admission by some of the speakers that misinterpretation of the Bible, on the part of believers, was one of the causes. The tendency, since the Reformation, of the popular religious mind “to confound inspiration on certain subjects, such as those mentioned by St. Paul, with infallibility on all subjects, such as Scripture nowhere claims,” was noted by one of the speakers as having produced very injurious effects. Still more striking was the statement made, by the same speaker, that the “Augustinian theosophy,” or, in other words, the view taken by Augustine of the permanence of an eternal, though impotent malevolence, has not only exerted an enormous influence against religion, but is the only cause which will probably be permanent. The statement, to a certain extent, is undoubtedly true, though clearly somewhat exaggerated.

supposed to be involved in or connected with the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

Let us speak first of recent historical criticism, and the injurious influence it has certainly exercised in reference to Revealed Religion. Its leading position has always been the same—that any narration of facts which involves the miraculous element in it must, for this very reason, be regarded with the gravest suspicion. “It is,” says Mr. Mill, “a noticeable and a very important consideration, that stories of miracles only grow up among the ignorant, and are adopted, if ever, by the educated when they have become the belief of multitudes.”<sup>2</sup> It is urged that early history in its earliest forms is found nearly always to involve the miraculous, but that investigation and close examination have never failed to show that the evidence on which the alleged miracles rest is totally untrustworthy. If this be so with all ancient history, why, it is said, is the ancient

<sup>2</sup> Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 238. It certainly seems reasonable to call in question the latter part of this statement. Surely history and psychology alike concur in substantiating the converse position, viz., that the educated commonly do not adopt the belief of the multitudes; but, unless they are drawn aside by self-interest, are either silent with regard to them, or tend to explain them away.

history of the Jewish people to be supposed to form any exception to the general principle? Why, too, it is added, is the same miraculous element in the history of the New Testament to be regarded otherwise than as involving a *prima facie* reason why the narrative should not be accepted as historically credible? And this presumption, be it observed, is independent, to a considerable extent, of the scientific aspect of the question whether miracles are or are not to be considered as *à priori* impossible. The case stands thus. A certain element is found in these narratives which, when found elsewhere, in early history, is invariably associated with what critical investigation shows to be mythical and legendary. The simple presence, then, of this element, it is urged, is in itself enough to raise a reasonable presumption against the true historic character of the narrative in which it finds a place.<sup>3</sup>

The answer to these objections is, happily, fair and reasonable, and has of late been set forth with considerable force and cogency. As

<sup>3</sup> The general question will be found popularly but fairly discussed, in a work which will certainly be of use to the general reader, viz., Barnes, *Evidences of Christianity in the Nineteenth Century*, Lect. ii. p. 35, seq. (London, 1871). The Lecture is entitled, "Historical Evidence as affected by Time."



it never seems desirable to state objections without also stating what may be fairly urged on the other side, I will venture to pause, for a minute or two, briefly to specify an answer, that, estimated fairly, does seem to meet practically the *à priori* objection which has just been specified. The answer, roughly stated, is this. The narrative of the Old Testament, and still more so that of the New Testament, is so essentially different in nature and character from that of the early and legendary narratives with which they have been compared, that the presence of the miraculous element in the one suggests no just ground for concluding, merely because that element is present in the other, that the associated narrative is consequently mythical and untrustworthy.<sup>4</sup> If

<sup>4</sup> It has been urged by a candid and competent critic in the *Spectator*, of October 28, that the objection is not accurately stated, and that the answer would not be considered by those who have studied the methods of historical criticism, and are conscious of feeling difficulties in reference to Scripture, as adequate, however true it may be in fact. It may be conceded that the critic states the objection with greater precision; but the upshot seems the same, that the difficulty is not practically felt to be great until the miraculous or the marvellous emerges and claims our belief. It may be quite true that the evidence might not, accurately considered, be deemed enough to warrant complete belief in any but the most broad and popular aspects of ordinary events, still it is the miracle that awakens the slumbering evidential sensibility, and so the

the narratives are essentially different in character, then the very utmost that can be said is this,—that the presence of the miraculous may raise a presumption against the credibility of the narrative, antecedent to any investigation of the nature of the narrative, but that it is on the results of a fair investigation of the document itself that the decision must ultimately be formed. Now without entering further into the nature of the Holy Scriptures as contrasted with other narratives in which the miraculous holds a place, this at least may be said, that in the Old Testament we have these unique characteristics,—first, a demonstrable continuity in the component portions, though these portions are numerous, diversified in character, and range over a period of a thousand years ;<sup>5</sup> secondly,—not only the pre-miracle, that, in a general way, may be considered the real stone of stumbling. In reference to the answer it may be also admitted that it perhaps cannot be claimed as conclusive ; but the presence of the phenomena in the documents alluded to in the text is certainly so remarkable, as to lead to the presumption that some agencies were connected with them qualitatively different to the ordinary agencies at work in the compilation of history. This presumption would, in the case of most minds, more or less predispose towards accepting as true what would have been otherwise instinctively set aside as untrustworthy or false.

<sup>5</sup> See a popular but effective statement of this continuity

sence of prophecies which can be shown to have been prior to the events to which they refer, and to have been verified in detail by those events, but a distinct continuity in the method of these prophetic utterances as well as a convergence in their scope. As it has been well said, "no amount of natural genius, no amount of the quickening of intellectual or emotional endowments can account for a long series of utterances by men of different habits, in different ages, and different grades of society, such that while they adequately embrace and express the junctures and troubles of their own day converge onwards to one single, distant event in the world's history, of which the world's history hitherto had afforded neither presentiment nor parallel."<sup>6</sup>

In the third place, still sharper is the contrast between the New Testament and any other documents or narratives with which, as similarly involving the miraculous element, it can possibly be compared. The narrative of the New Testament does not refer to, or include, a remote past, but relates events which, it is

in *Credentials of Christianity*, p. 17, seq. (Hodder and Stoughton, Lond. 1876).

<sup>6</sup> Pritchard, *Sermon preached before the British Association at Exeter*, p. 22 (Lond. 1869).

alleged, took place at a definite time in the world's history, when the principles of history were generally known and recognized. Unless, therefore, it can be shown that the narrative was composed so long after the events that mythical additions would have had time to grow up around them, no just argument, on historical considerations (I am not now alluding to the scientific argument), can be used against the credibility of the narrative on the ground of the presence of the miraculous. The attempt to prove that the Gospels were drawn up as much posterior to the events as the mythical hypothesis requires may now be asserted, with perfect fairness, to have finally broken down. But this portion of our subject we do not at present pursue further. All that we now assert is—that the popular arguments derived from historical criticism will not be found to be of any real force or validity, when closely examined. But unfortunately the arguments are *not* closely examined. The assertions of opponents are tacitly credited with a far greater authority than they have any real claim to. Popular criticism, even in respectable Church papers, often uses a language that is seriously calculated to mislead, by the studious respect with which it speaks of publications that

fairly do not deserve it.<sup>7</sup> A vague impression is left on the mind of the reader that something, if not unanswerable, yet to which a direct answer has not as yet been found, has at length been brought forward. The vague, floating doubts within gain strength and coherence; and the result frequently is a state of anxiety and suspended belief, as to many details, which never fails to exercise a very harmful and deteriorating influence, especially in the case of those who have to teach and to guide others.

I do not wish in any way to represent the case worse than it is,—but I certainly fear that even among sober and religious persons the number of those who feel real difficulties in

<sup>7</sup> I may specify, by way of example, the reception that was given to the work entitled, *Supernatural Religion*, two or three years ago. It was spoken of, by more than one religious periodical, in terms of studious respect, which now, after the searching criticisms of Dr. Lightfoot in the *Contemporary Review*, and the extremely able answer of Mr. Sanday, we may certainly complain of as misplaced. Our opponents ought always to receive at our hands fairness and courtesy; but it becomes positively mischievous, especially at a time like the present, when there is such a distinct tendency to consider everything as opinionable, to make complimentary and concessive statements as to the general tenor of sceptical arguments, until a close investigation shall have proved, beyond all reasonable doubt, that it is right and equitable to make them. The harm done by these reviews is excessive.

reference to many things in the Old Testament is distinctly increasing.<sup>8</sup> And this increase is in a great measure due to the evil effects produced by the historical criticism to which I am now alluding, left unchallenged and unexamined as that criticism too often is by the

<sup>8</sup> The difficulties connected with the Old Testament are set forth briefly, but forcibly, in the article in the *Spectator* referred to above (p. 29, note). The greatest difficulty, however, is not distinctly specified. It is not wholly the case that "in proportion as the Old Testament history approaches times in which it relies on contemporary records, the number of the marvels dwindles," but in one set of instances, even the converse,—viz., the miracles recorded in the histories of Elijah and Elisha. It is this presence of the miraculous in what would seem to be the ordinary and current history of a nation that does appear to create real difficulty. In the early history and development of the world we seem prepared, by the necessarily exceptional circumstances of the case, almost to expect the interpositions which we find recorded; in later history the case is different. I cannot refer the reader to any really full and clear discussion of this subject, but must content myself by pointing out that the more we become convinced that the history of the Old Testament is a true and providential history of God's dealings with the one race in the old world that were the depositaries of the true belief in the one and only God (and the plain facts that bring this home to us are numerous, convincing, and yearly multiplying), the more we shall find ourselves, reverently and persuadedly, giving our heart-belief to the inspired narrative, even in those portions which, at first sight, might seem to be exceptional and difficult. God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts.

otiose if not receptive reader. Say what we will, there is always in the background of the poor human heart a proneness to give heed to the attack, and a disinclination seriously and conscientiously to follow out the true lines of the defence. Every fairly educated person thinks that he will be quite able to find his own answer;—but when the hour of real soul-trial comes, and the yea or no in vital questions is at last brought home to the heart, too often alas! it is found that doubt has silently sapped all the more stable foundations of belief, and that all within is uncertainty and confusion.

And if this, only too often, be the effect of current historical criticism, when applied to the Holy Scriptures, still more serious, as I implied in my first Address, is the effect produced by the speculative deductions that have been made from the real or alleged discoveries of modern science. I advisedly say real or alleged,—for I am persuaded that many scientific theories of the present day which are now current and popular, will in the sequel have to be seriously reconsidered and modified. Who, for example, can really believe that there is such a thing as a “waste-heap” in the universe, and yet we are told by men who deservedly occupy a high place in the ranks of science, that there is

such a thing, and that it is made up of diffused heat, and is growing larger and larger as time goes onward.<sup>9</sup> Who again, if heat really be atomic motion, can very readily be led to conceive, with Professor Hæckel and others, an aboriginal universe of highly heated cosmic vapour while the question yet remains to be answered where did the heat originally come from? Or yet again, in reference to the most popular subject of all, evolution,—how is it able to account for that similarity of the ultimate particles of matter which may now be said to have been almost demonstrated? If the molecule is “incapable of growth or decay, of generation or destruction,”<sup>1</sup> how can we reconcile such characteristics with the operation of those purely natural causes which are now so persistently claimed to be the constructive principles of the universe? Such questions, neither captious nor unreasonable, could be multiplied almost indefinitely, in reference to several alleged dis-

<sup>9</sup> This opinion, or rather the expression alluded to, has been criticized by Professor Birks, in his valuable tract entitled the *Uncertainties of Modern Physical Science*, p. 22, seq. (Hardwicke, Lond. 1876). This is one of the many useful tracts published by the Victoria Institute, and formed the annual Address to the Society for the present year.

<sup>1</sup> Clerk Maxwell, *Lecture delivered at Bradford in 1873*.



coveries which are causing considerable anxiety to many religious minds at the present time. The questions, however, are overlooked ; the reasonable doubts as to the eventual truth of the assertions entirely passed over ; the scientific results are accepted as final ; the deductions from them that may be attractively set forth in some brilliant and popular address are considered to be valid ; old opinions and beliefs, it is thought, must be abandoned ; serious disquietude is very widely felt ; latent doubts are permitted to gain accumulated strength ;—and all this time it is positively questionable whether the theories, on which the whole superstructure of doubts and difficulties connectedly rests, can properly be considered to be substantiated. The uncertainties of modern physical science are by no means to be regarded as existing only in the minds of prejudiced theologians.

It may be admitted, however, that though most of the more startling popular theories are either still utterly uncertain, or, like the principle of Natural Selection, are found to require very serious rehabilitation, there remain some at least that *seem* to militate with received opinions, and are consequently causing to many minds very great disquietude. It may be admitted, for example, that, in a certain sense,

the principle of evolution is apparently supported by trustworthy evidence.<sup>2</sup> It seems also probable that the existence of man upon the earth is to be referred to a period slightly more distant than that which has commonly been assigned<sup>3</sup>—and it perhaps may be conceded

<sup>2</sup> The theory of evolution is still very far from being scientifically established; and also, if true, very far from standing in any antithesis whatever to creation. It has been justly observed by Mr. Row that there are undoubtedly "indications that in the formation of the universe the Creator has acted through the agency of means, and not by direct action." He adds, however, very properly, that it is quite another question whether this be an entire account of the matter. See Row, *Principles of Modern Pantheistic and Atheistic Philosophy*, p. 27 (Hardwicke, Lond. 1874); compare also the special work of St. Clair, *Creation by Evolution* (Hodder and Stoughton, Lond. 1873). It need scarcely be added that the evolution here referred to does not, by any means, involve or imply the truth of the particular theory known by the name of Natural Selection. The one is a broad principle for which there certainly seems some evidence; the other is a special exemplification of it, against which, as originally defined, there lie apparently insuperable objections.

<sup>3</sup> Much needless disquietude has been caused to many religious minds, by the unconscious assumption that the chronology of Abp. Usher is as inspired as the document on which its results are placed. It is now well known that if we take our computation from the Septuagint, we lengthen the duration of man's existence some 1000 years. Whether this extension is sufficient to account for the developments in civilization which history discloses cannot perhaps, at present, be dogmatically asserted. This, however, seems

that, in the origination of species, laws hitherto not recognized may be considered now to rest on sufficient induction. This, *apparently*—I desire to emphasize this word—may now be admitted by cool and reasonable thinkers. What, however, does it amount to beyond this—that our adorable Creator has permitted the creatures of His hand to catch clearer glimpses, as the ages roll onward, of the blessed mysteries of His providential wisdom and power. And this which ought really to dispose our hearts to deeper reverence and more adoring love, has been made to become to us a source of hindrances and temptations. These silently disclosed mysteries which ought to awaken in each true and loving soul a more lively apprehension of the mercy and majesty of the Creator, have been perverted by the cold heart of unbelief or the vanity of a spurious science into arguments against the truth of

certain, that modern historical criticism has reduced the vast demands of time, once supposed to be made by early Egyptian history, to very manageable dimensions. The era of Menes is now placed by Lepsius as less than 4000 years before Christ; and this, very probably, is 800 years too early. See a paper entitled, *Egypt and the Bible* (p. 18), read by J. E. Howard, F.R.S., before the Victoria Institute in April, 1876; and compare Clarke, *Ten Ancient Religions of the World*, p. 231, seq. (Boston, 1871.)

revealed religion, and have been made to minister to distrust in the holy reality of the fatherhood of God.

Our very blessings have thus been made banes to us. Those very discoveries which ought still more clearly to reveal our Creator to us as everywhere present in the realms of that nature which is the work of His hands, are now being largely misused by the powers of evil, working it may be in these days of increased knowledge more energetically than ever, and are turned against the very truths, viz.:—the existence and personality of God, which (it would seem) they were mysteriously designed to support and substantiate. During the past hundred years, and especially during the last portion of that time, the All-Good, the All-wise, and the All-Merciful has permitted the creatures of His hand to see far, far, more clearly than in any centuries of the past, the glory and the majesty of His works,—and yet it is impossible to deny that during that time, and especially recently, the light that ought to have been welcomed almost as a new revelation of the wisdom and omnipotence of God, has, in many and many a soul, become a cheerless and deepening darkness. “If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.”

I feel, therefore, that it may be truly said, that though it does seem certain that the alleged discoveries of recent science, and, still more, the rash and unlicensed deductions that have been made from them, have caused the greatest possible amount of doubt and disquietude in thousands of hearts,—yet that these two things also are certain. First, that of these alleged discoveries some are, in a very high degree, scientifically doubtful. Secondly, that of these same discoveries, those which apparently seem to be trustworthy are distinctly evidences, not, as it is alleged, against, but *for* the blessed truth of the existence and personality of God, and that, too, in a very marked and even providential manner.

But, in the third place, if much of the unbelief of our own times is to be referred to this misuse of the blessings of which true science is designed to be the minister,—if many of our modern religious difficulties may be traced to scientific generalizations, or, as it might more truly be said, to scientific speculations, which all real science is tending, more and more, to disown and repudiate, still more distinctly may we trace the prevalence of unbelief to the moral and metaphysical difficulties which have been supposed to be involved in the

fundamental truths of the Christian dispensation.

The problem of the existence of evil, especially the traces of the misery and suffering of living creatures, ages before man's sin cast its sad shadow on the creation around,—the still deeper problems connected with the holy mystery of sin's atonement, and the dark and terrible questions that are connected with the doom of the impenitent—these three aspects of physical and moral evil do, beyond all doubt, fearfully try the faith of thousands at the present time. They subtly appeal to the poor doubting heart, and at once ally themselves with the difficulties which may have already been suggested by historical criticism, or scientific speculation. Our very increased knowledge becomes a snare to us. The more science displays to us the wonders of the realms of nature around us, the further we see into the beauty and the glory of the marvellous works of God,—the more terrible seems the difficulty connected with the power and presence of evil.<sup>4</sup> Whence comes

<sup>4</sup> The difficulties connected with this subject are extremely great. Some considerations which appear to lessen them will be found in the essay on "The Adequacy of the Christian Answer to all deeper questions," in *Credentials of Christianity*, p. 255 (Hodder and Stoughton, Lond. 1876). See also the striking sermon of Mr. Jayne,

the frightful shadow in a world where it would seem everything was designed to be brightness and light? Why is its power often so palpably displayed where it would seem to have the least reason of being expected,—and where its effects seem to be as undeserved as they are malefic. Will it endure for ever? Will this world,—this age as Scripture calls it,—end in an unsolved dualism, and if so, will all the ages which follow it? Will the real or apparent antinomy ever be adjusted?<sup>5</sup> or will the æons of the future still be witnesses of evil, subjugated it may be, yet existing and defiant in its very subjugation? And if so, how and in what sense are we to understand that which not only Scripture but the inner voice of our innermost being tells us must be eternally true,—even that God will become all in all? What sign, what token is there, either in the moral world or in those wide realms of the material world which science is now so mysteriously revealing to us, that verily there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be

on “The Difficulties arising from the Existence of Physical and Moral Evil,” in *Modern Religious Difficulties*, p. 25, sq. (Chr. Knowl. Society, Lond. 1876).

<sup>5</sup> See Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, § 286, p. 478 (Transl.); *Credentials of Christianity*, p. 275, seq.; *Primary Charge*, p. 109, seq. (Gloucester, 1864.)

no more suffering, no more trial, and from which every trace of moral and physical evil will have passed utterly away?—These questions, which we well know, can never be answered while we yet only know in part and prophesy in part,—these questions which really can only properly be met by a faith that finds it easier to believe impossibilities than to doubt for one instant in the mercy and the love of God—these questions, these enigmas of life as they are called, are now pressed home on us in a manner and with a frequency which I fear is telling seriously upon the shallow, the careless, the worldly, the cold-hearted, and the doubting. They readily combine, as I have already said, with the difficulties arising from other considerations. Each class of difficulties helps to augment the force of the others,—and the result is that tendency to doubt everything, and to consider everything opinionable which I specified yesterday, and which I cannot but regard as the very worst and most menacing sign of our times.

On this I shall hope to speak in a succeeding Address.

Meanwhile let me now conclude with a very few words of earnest and brotherly counsel. Dear friends, this is a time for us all to pray



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not only for truer faith in our own hearts, but for the power to bring home that faith tenderly, persuasively, and cogently, to the hearts of those to whom we are appointed to minister. If the three causes to which I have alluded are now potently at work,—surely now is the time for us to do our best to counteract them among those that may be committed to our charge, and this, by the blessing of God, can only be done one way,—not by arguments which the doubting heart will always think it can answer,—but by that intelligent and sympathetic mode of setting forth the truth,—that demonstration of the Spirit, which ever bears with it real and abiding conviction. Controversy, in the case of those circumstanced as we are, does but little,—but some knowledge of the difficulties to which I have been alluding is, year by year, becoming more and more necessary, especially to those of us who have to minister to the cultivated and to the intelligent. There are, I fear, very many who are losing true peace of soul, and losing that love to Jesus as our Saviour and our God, on which everything in this world and the world to come eternally depends. If this be so, then verily there is no graver duty that is now imposed upon us than to strive, by wise and gentle teaching,—by a teaching that knows

well the difficulties that it seeks to remove, again to bring the love of Christ back into the soul, and with that love to bear back heart-belief, hope, and consolation. The only truth that will be found, when properly grasped, to bear abiding consolation, in reference to the deep speculative difficulties to which I have alluded, is contained in the Saviour's own words, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This verily is, and ever will be, found to be consolation, conviction, and light.

Lord God Almighty, vouchsafe to us all wisdom, counsel, and knowledge, but above all things vouchsafe to us sympathy and love.

# THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN UNBELIEF.

[DELIVERED AT STROUD, ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26TH, 1876.]

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WE have now seen that there appear to be grave reasons for thinking that unbelief, in various forms, is displaying itself among us to an extent that is causing very grave and widespread anxiety; and we have also examined what would seem to be the principal causes to which this unbelief may most plausibly be referred. The general course of the argument seems now to lead us onward to a consideration of no less importance, viz., the nature and characteristics of those forms of unbelief which are now most current, and with which those of us who are ministers of Christ are most likely to come in contact among those who may be committed to our charge.

To this portion of the subject then, viz., the

characteristics of modern unbelief, we may now confine ourselves. In doing so, however, we shall be wise to remain content with broad and general outlines. I shall not ask you, my friends, to follow me into any minute discussion of the various schools of sceptical thought; nor shall I attempt, on this present occasion, to analyze the many startling theories with which those who are acquainted with modern scepticism are only too sadly familiar. Such analyses are but of little practical importance, and they are only too often utterly sketchy and inaccurate. Nay, they are often worse than inaccurate. They often tend to mislead the inexperienced reader, and to divert his thought from those broad principles, common to several forms of sceptical thought, to which our attention ought to be mainly, if not exclusively, directed. Under this sort of illusory guidance, many a reader utterly fails to recognize his own mental state in reference to the various phases of unbelief which he may be endeavouring to analyze. He may often honestly think and feel that he has but little sympathy with any one of the systems which he may find labelled as Atheism or Pantheism, Materialism or Agnosticism, and yet he may be unconsciously gravitating to ultimate posi-

tions common to some or even to all of them, which are utterly inimical to all religious life, and incompatible with all true and revealed religion. The result often is that shaken state, that believing in nothing, not even in any general form of unbelief itself, which I have already noted as the worst and greatest of the spiritual dangers of our own times.

As to the real distinctions between the various forms of unbelief, of which now we hear so much, they are simple and few. If we set aside all those phases and forms of belief in something beyond ourselves, as, for instance, polytheism,<sup>1</sup> which are obviously only transitional, we have ultimately only three systems, marked by the

<sup>1</sup> As the present series of Addresses is confined to unbelief in its modern aspects, no reference is made to heathen religions ancient or modern. It may be well, however, to notice, for the benefit of the general reader who may be acquainted with German, that brief but satisfactory accounts of the principal religions of the world will be found in the second part of Ebrard; *Apologetik* (Gütersloh, 1875). The older works of Archdeacon Hardwick, *Christ and other Masters* (Ed. iii., 1874), and of Clarke (J. F.), *Ten Great Religions* (Boston, 1871), will always be referred to with profit. For ground-principles of the leading modern systems of thought the reader may consult the two volumes of Lectures published by the Christian Evidence Society, entitled *Modern Scepticism*, and *Faith and Free Thought*: see also Christlieb, *Modern Doubt and Christian Belief*. Lect. iii. (Clark, Edinb. 1874).

following broad distinctions :—First, belief in a personal God, the creator and moral governor of the Universe ; secondly, acknowledgment of the existence of an impersonal First Cause, Power, or Intelligence, conscious or unconscious, either, on the one hand immanent in, and inseparable from, the totality of things, with which totality it is itself to be identified,—or, on the other hand, so far separable that the phenomenal universe is to be regarded as its outward manifestation and investiture ; thirdly, denial, direct or inferential, both of a personal God, and of a First Cause, whether identifiable with or separate from nature.

Of these three systems the first, to which we commonly assign the title of Theism, includes Christianity and all such religions as recognize the moral government of God, and regard Him as the personal Creator and Preserver of all things.

The second system, under its first form, includes Pantheism and all those phases of it which may be properly grouped under this common term. Under its second form we have to include the cognate, but more modern conception of an unknown and unknowable Power, working by evolutionary laws, consciously or unconsciously, but so far the independent cause,

or rather substratum, of all phenomena, so that (to use the language of one of the exponents of this form of thought) the visible and material universe forms the garment and vesture of the unknown Intelligence to whom all things are ultimately to be referred.<sup>2</sup>

To this second form, which is obviously a modification and modern exhibition of the first, no specific name has yet been formally assigned. One of its more recent supporters speaks of it as Cosmic Theism, but if we give to it the title of Paratheism,<sup>3</sup> that is, a perversion of the essential idea of all true Theism, viz., the personality of God, we may perhaps fairly

<sup>2</sup> See Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 417. The definition of the First Cause according to this writer is as follows:—"There exists a POWER to which no limit in time or space is conceivable, of which all phenomena, as presented in consciousness, are manifestations, *but which we can know only through these manifestations*," p. 415. Compare Spencer, *First Principles*, § 31, p. 108, seq., and see below, p. 68, note <sup>9</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> It seems very desirable to have some short and fairly-significant term to designate this form of unbelief, more especially as it is the most prevalent at the present time. It is both wrong and unjust to speak of the advocates of this system as Atheists. They are not so. Their opinions are, however, scarcely less dangerous; they involve a distinct denial of the personality of God (see Spencer, *First Principles*, § 31, p. 109, seq.), on which everything ultimately will be found to depend, and yet they often use a language which seems really theistic. See below, p. 67.

mark its essential character, and also conveniently separate it from the Pantheism to which it is allied, but with which it is by no means identical.

The third system is distinctly atheistic: it acknowledges neither a personal God nor an impersonal First Cause, but accounts for the existence of things either by the assumption of endless emanations from something aboriginal and primordial,—as in some of the great Oriental systems,—or by the continuous action of Force on Matter, both being supposed to have existed from eternity, and to act upon and to modify each other for ever.<sup>4</sup>

We have thus, first, Theism; then, secondly, the denial of the true theistic principle,—the personality of God,—either by identifying God with the universe, as in Pantheism, or in declaring Him to be Unknown and Unknowable, as in the case of that which I have ventured to call Paratheism; and then, lastly, emanational or materialistic Atheism.

When we leave details and particulars, and

<sup>4</sup> The insurmountable metaphysical difficulties in this unhappy system of thought have been acutely pointed out by Mr. Spencer: his summary is that "The Atheistic theory is not only absolutely unthinkable, but even if it were thinkable, would not be a solution."—*First Principles*, § 11, p. 31.



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endeavour to take a general view of these three forms of religious and non-religious thought, several considerations of great importance suggest themselves to our minds. And, first of all, this—that though, as a matter of mere arrangement, Christianity may be included in the same broad division with other theistic religions, as acknowledging a personal God, in contradistinction to an impersonal First Cause, yet that the difference between Christianity and all other theistic religions is, qualitatively, so great that we should really be more in harmony with the true facts of the case if we were wholly to segregate Christianity from all other religious systems that the world has ever known. Christianity, in the classification of religions, is much in the same position as man in the classifications of physiology. We may, for a kind of convenience, place our own race among and at the head of the Quadrumana, as having certain physical characteristics which are common to the whole order; but when we regard man on his spiritual side, and recognize in him reason and speech, and—except in rare and exceptional cases—acknowledgment of a moral law, and belief in a God, we feel at once how much more consistent it would be with all the facts of the case to

classify man, as Scripture classifies him, with reference to the image of God, of which he is alone the adumbration.

Just so is it with Christianity. It may be convenient, for the sake of preserving broad and intelligible distinctions to allow it to be classed with theistic religions, but it really stands nearly as far apart from every other system as man does from every other genus of living and sentient creatures. I say advisedly, *nearly* as far apart,—for though it is only the New Testament that reveals to us the true nature of the Triune God, we may not and must not forget that the God of the old dispensation is the God also of the new, and that though the blessed Gospel alone tells us of Christ that is come, the Law and the prophets tell of Him that was to come,<sup>5</sup> and are as the dawn that ushers in the brightness of the day.

<sup>5</sup> Nothing can be clearer or more exactly true than the statement of Hooker on this point. "The general end," he says, "both of the Old Testament and New Testament is one; the difference between them consisting in this, that the Old did make wise by teaching salvation through Christ that should come, the New by teaching that Christ the Saviour is come, and that Jesus whom the Jews did crucify, and whom God did raise again from the dead is He." *Eccles. Polity*, i. 14, 4; vol. i. p. 338 (Ed. Keble).

This must never be forgotten, and it may be that in this respect the above analogy can scarcely be fully maintained; still it may be useful in warning us against two prevalent errors in regard of the popular estimate of Christianity—first, the distinct and dangerous error of considering Christianity as the development of Judaism;<sup>6</sup> secondly, the still graver error of deeming Christianity the last, and presumably the best of a series of evolutions of religious thought; but still, a form and phase of religious belief, which, in its turn, may be superseded by some development of the future.<sup>7</sup> These are

<sup>6</sup> Attention has not been sufficiently called to this serious though, commonly, unconsciously-held error. It will be found in much of our popular preaching, and, though doing little real harm to those who are believers, is nevertheless extremely dangerous as involving a form of concession tacitly made to opponents. If it be conceded that the New Testament is only an expansion of the Old, it is hard to see how the possibility of the New Testament being only preparatory to some more perfect system can be logically denied. Our 7th Article wisely limits itself to the indisputable truth that, “the Old Testament is not contrary to the New.” On the distinction between Judaism and Christianity, see Voigt, *Fundamentaldogmatik*, § 15, p. 350, sq. (Gotha, 1874); and for a careful investigation of the distinctive features of the theology of the Old Testament, see Oehler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Einleitung, Kap. i.—iv., vol. i. p. 7, seq. (Tübingen, 1873).

<sup>7</sup> This is the general idea that forms the basis of modern attempts to found what is called a science of religions; see

two errors of our own times, against which it is our duty to protest with all earnestness and persistency. Christianity is neither a development nor an evolution. It is no republication, as it used to be once regarded, of the law of nature; still less is it a mere expansion and development of Judaism. Christianity is alike a revelation and a realization. Under the one aspect it is the blessed disclosure of that mystery which had been sealed in silence since the foundation of the world; under the other, it is a bringing home to every living soul of that which had been the dim and latent hope of the poor suffering heart of humanity in all ages and all times, but which never became an objective reality until angel voices on the slopes of Bethlehem sang of peace and blessedness to mankind; and was never made the heritage of our race until the words "It is finished" proclaimed salvation,—salvation present, prospec-

below, p. 59. The great religions of the world are considered to follow each other in a kind of historical sequence, and a future is looked forward to, in which either some new religion will emerge out of the best elements of those existing (Hartmann, *Religion der Zukunft*, Leipzig, 1875), or the truest of the existing forms (it is not stated which this is) will gradually absorb the others; see Burnouf, *La Science des Religions*, chap. vi. p. 174. The reader should be reminded that this is *not* the great oriental scholar of that name. The initials are the same.

tive, and retrospective, unto all the ages, nations, and families of the children of men.

There is no truth which is more necessary for us to maintain and set forth at the present time than this essential character of the Gospel dispensation, and of the Christianity which is its result. There is a large amount of unconscious Judaism among many really religious people. There are thousands of sober and even devout persons who, if they were to be closely examined, would be found to regard the change that was introduced by the teaching of Christ as not utterly dissimilar in its character to the religious changes that were brought about by the Reformation. Even better educated persons often use language, in regard of Christian when compared with Jewish institutions, which is highly unsatisfactory and precarious. There often is no sufficient consciousness shown of the mighty revolution in the whole religious history of the world, which was introduced by the preaching of the Gospel; no clear realization of the vital truth that Christianity is a new dispensation,—new, not renewed.<sup>8</sup> The con-

<sup>8</sup> See Heb. viii. 13, ἐν τῷ λέγειν Καινήν, πεπαλαίωκεν τὴν πρώτην· τὸ δὲ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ. Though παλαιῶν, as Lunemann (*in loc.*) correctly observes, does not, of itself, definitely mean “to abrogate,” the idea is clearly implied and involved in the context.

tinuity, which we rightly recognize and trace in the Holy Scriptures, is often unconsciously exaggerated into such an equalization, so to speak, of the authority and essential characteristics of the Law and the Gospel, as to cause the greatest difficulty to yet unpersuaded seekers, and to give countenance to the gravest misconception that can possibly be entertained of Christianity.

This unconsciously erroneous teaching is, however, not only dangerous in itself, but especially so in the encouragement it gives to the second and graver error to which I have alluded, viz., that of regarding Christianity as the last result of the gradual development of the religious idea in mankind. We are now told that the eternal truths of the Gospel are really no more than the last improvements in the religious perceptions of the race, which themselves will have to be so greatly improved upon as practically to be improved away altogether ;<sup>9</sup> and we are, consequently, reminded

<sup>9</sup> What we are now told is this, whatever it may exactly mean, that it is our duty to inquire, "whether, in the nature of things, a substitution of scientific for theological symbols involves an alteration of ethical values in the grand equation between duty and action," Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 453. The result of the inquiry is stated, and is so far comforting, as we are assured that

that we have no right to claim for them that vast qualitative difference, which every one who loves and adores Christ crucified, knows verily to exist between Christianity and every other form of belief which the world has ever yet known. Nay, so far have we advanced in these conceptions, that a new science is now struggling for a place,—the science of religion as it is called,—a science which not only claims to teach us how religion has followed the laws of development and of natural selection which prevail in the physical world, but how in the future we may look for grander developments, when Aryan polytheism, and Semitic monotheism, and Oriental pantheism, will all be merged in that one Universal Religion which is to be the blessing and glory of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

“no such change is involved in the substitution.” The writer, however, goes on to say that we must be prepared for “the throwing overboard of the whole semi-barbaric mythology in which Christianity has hitherto been symbolized,” p. 454. We have obviously not much to hope for from Cosmic Theists.

<sup>1</sup> The outlines of this religion are sketched by Hartmann in his recent work alluded to above, p. 55, note 7. The author states, with studious modesty, that he is only able to describe a few of the piers on which the new way of the future is to rest; but he says enough to imply that a sort of rehabilitated pantheism, or “pantheistic monism” (what-

We smile when we hear such things: but, my dear friends, there is a growing tendency to believe in these wild antichristian dreams. This theory of religious evolution is put forward with much skill and persuasiveness. Nay, we have heard echoes of it in so-called missionary addresses, and in places where we might properly look for very different teaching. We have heard a little already, and as time goes onward we shall hear much more. Liberality of sentiment, and what is termed breadth of religious thought, are now the popular characteristics of much of the current theology of our own day; and this breadth and liberality are daily bearing onward weaker and less disciplined thinkers into conceptions of Christianity which are wholly incompatible with its true nature and essence. It may be permissible to believe in a law of progress in theology,<sup>2</sup> in

ever that exactly may be),—"a synthesis of the religious development of India, and of the Judæo-Christian development," is to be the universal religion of the future: see *Religion der Zukunft*, Kap. ix. *ad fin.*, and compare *Credentials of Christianity*, Lect. vi. p. 274, note (Lond. 1876).

<sup>2</sup> This question has formed the subject of two striking and thoughtful sermons by my friend, Dr. Plumptre (*Respice, Aspice, Prospice, and the Law of Progress in Theology*, Daldy and Co., Lond. 1876). Though we may not be able to follow the preacher in all details, there will be few who will not acknowledge the general truth of his statements,



accordance with which old and vital truths may receive new elucidations and enhancements,—but that progress, which consists in dropping what is really distinctive, and conserving only what may be common to other religions besides our own, is one of those results of this new science of religion which may well make us all careful, lest, through ignorance and an imperfect estimate of Christianity, we ourselves may be unconsciously adding force to this popular Pelagianism, and to this current but most dangerous theosophy.

One truth there is in these matters which stands for ever firm,—one truth that must be held to with ever-increasing tenacity,—that there is none other name given to man whereby he can be saved but the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and our God.

There is another consideration of some moment which seems to result from a fair comparison with each other of the three broad classifications which we are now dwelling upon,—and it is this, that we have no great reason to fear any real advance on the side of pure materialism, and of what may be justly defined as distinct atheistic teaching. Two or three or will fail to admire the force and ability with which a very difficult subject is discussed.

years ago a little impulse was given to this unhappy system by a well-known and brilliant misuse of a responsible position.<sup>3</sup> Matter was to do a great deal for us ; we were to look to it for the promises and potencies of terrestrial life ; but it would seem that all who have followed the advice have become already singularly discontented with the results they have arrived at. Two great facts there are which will always keep materialism in check, and which may serve to reassure us under any fears of growing tendencies towards atheistic speculation. The first is this,—that the further

<sup>3</sup> What the opinions of the distinguished author of the Belfast Address really are, I do not know, and cannot clearly ascertain. It is certain, however, that portions of the Address were accepted both by friends and foes, as favouring distinctly materialistic conceptions. In the two remarkable articles of Dr. Martineau in the *Contemporary Review* for February and March, 1876, in answer to Dr. Tyndall, the design of the writer is stated as defensive, and “to repel the pretensions of speculative *materialism*, to supersede the ‘theological conception,’ by tracing that pretension to an imperfect appreciation of the ultimate logic of science.”—*Cont. Rev.*, p. 517. Whatever may be the personal belief of the writer, it certainly seems just to say that several passages in his Address do appear to place before us, not light, but—to use the eloquent words of Dr. Martineau,—“a phosphorescence of matter set up by the chemistry of nature, not to see things by, but to glisten on the darkness.” The effect of such passages, especially on the minds of the young, is excessively injurious.

true advance is made in molecular physics, and in those principles of atomic philosophy on which materialism mainly rests as its foundation, the more distinctly is it seen that we are in the very realm of what have been called by those most qualified to give an opinion, "manufactured articles,"<sup>4</sup> that is, elements which point to a Maker; and, further, that the system that is to teach us how to dispense with a divine Artificer, is that very system which in the sequel, under the guidance of true science, will most convincingly demonstrate His blessed being and existence.

<sup>4</sup> This remarkable expression appears to have been first used by Sir J. F. W. Herschel in his *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy*, Art. 28, p. 38 (Longmans, Lond. 1851). It was fully justified and expanded by Prof. Clerk Maxwell, in his remarkable *Discourse on Molecules*, delivered at Bradford in Sept. 1873. "Each molecule," the Professor observes, "throughout the universe bears impressed on it the stamp of a metric system as distinctly as does the metre of the Archives at Paris, or the double royal cubit of the Temple of Karnac," p. 12. Some exception has been taken to this expression; see, however, the comments of Prof. Clerk Maxwell, at the concluding part of his extremely valuable article on "Atom," in the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. In that article (p. 49) the important observation is made that, "the formation of the molecule is therefore an event not belonging to that order of nature under which we live. . . . It must be referred to the epoch, not of the formation of the earth or of the solar system, but of the establishment of the existing order of nature."

The second great fact that is brought home to us by all experience is this,—that man's heart *will* crave after a Father and a God, and that, be the speculative opinions what they may, there will always be found in the zones of the affections and in that mysterious world of emotions, which so often seems to be the home of our truest self, a deep longing, and as Scripture expresses it, a feeling after an unseen Being of power and blessedness, toward whom the soul strives to rise, and with whom it seeks to make itself one. I know well that it may be said not only that there are exceptional cases in which the hapless and denaturalized soul seems utterly to disavow the idea of a God,—but that a great religion or, to speak more accurately, a great philosophical system, I mean, of course, Buddhism, can exist, nay can even number as many adherents as Christianity, and yet be, in theory at least, distinctly atheistic. I know it; but I answer, first, that the cases of those who have remained to the very last hour of life atheists,<sup>5</sup> are, thanks be to God, so utterly

<sup>5</sup> An instance is given by the author of *Heterodox London* (vol. ii.), and a melancholy account is given of the burial and speeches at the grave. We may observe, however, a tendency, apparently increasing, to fall back on nescience, not definitely and categorically to deny. For example, in

few as to tend rather to substantiate, than invalidate, the general principle. Secondly, I believe it may be unhesitatingly said that Buddhism could never have maintained its hold over the millions that it can number as its adherents, if it had not, almost from the very first, tacitly converted Buddha into its God, and practically made its very *Nirvāna* an enduring Elysium, rather than a realm of extinction and night. Say what we will, there ever lingers in the soul this sensibility, this gravitation towards the author of its being, which will always prevent any real spread of materialism. We could have no better illustration of the truth of this than is afforded us by the posthumous essays of Mr. Mill. From these it is clear that, though he seems to have regarded Matter and Force as eternal, he still could not dispense with the idea of a God—a God, it is true, of limited power and wisdom, yet of an infinite benevolence which might call out every

the *Secular Review* for Nov. 5, 1876, reference is made to death as something which may be rightly compared with birth. "We come here," the writer says, "without promise given; we leave without stipulations being made: and there is no warrant from experience why those who use life nobly and gracefully should not regard the end as the beginning was—a glad surprise." Compare Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 210.

co-operative energy of man, and something even higher than his love.<sup>6</sup>

Such testimonies as these against the extreme assertions of positivism and materialism are of great and enduring importance.

Our dangers come not from these unnatural forms of thought and speculation, but from those systems which I grouped together as admitting in some form or other a First Cause, and as tolerating towards it, if not commending, expressions of something which in Christian language would be spoken of as worship and adoration. Even such a writer as Strauss can speak of that on which we feel ourselves entirely dependent as "by no means merely a rude power, to which we bow in mute resignation, but as both order and law, reason and goodness, to which we surrender ourselves in loving trust."<sup>7</sup> And when I read to you the following passage, and tell you that it comes from an eminent writer who warmly supports the philosophy of Mr. Herbert Spencer, and distinctly opposes and condemns the Christian conception of a personal God, you will, I think, feel with

<sup>6</sup> See Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted for this quotation to an excellent tract by Prebendary Row entitled, *The Principles of Pantheistic Philosophy*, § 43, p. 17 (Hardwick, Lond. 1874).

me that this adoption of the language of Christianity, while the fundamental position of Christianity is denied, cannot but be fraught with danger to the undisciplined and inexperienced. "Every temptation that is resisted, every sympathetic impulse that is discreetly yielded to, every noble aspiration that is encouraged, every sinful thought that is repressed, every bitter word that is withheld, adds its little item to the impetus of the great movement which is bearing humanity onward towards a richer life and higher character. Out of individual rectitude come the rectitude and happiness of the community ; so that the ultimate salvation of mankind is to be wrought out solely by that obedience to the religious instinct which urges the individual, irrespective of utilitarian considerations, to live in conformity with nature's requirements. ' Nearer, my God, to Thee ' is the prayer, dictated by the religious faith of past ages, to which the deepest scientific analysis of the future may add new meanings, but of which it can never impair the primary significance." <sup>8</sup> In this passage, remarkable in many respects, and leading one to hope better things for the writer of it, the

<sup>8</sup> Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 502 (Lond. 1874).

higher aspirations of the soul are sympathized with, and that most dangerous of all dangerous impressions is left upon the heart, especially of the young and the sensitive—that it may be possible to be not only moral but religious, and yet deny every clause and article,—let us say, of the Apostle's creed.

This is the great practical danger we have to face in connexion with the present tendencies to scepticism and infidelity. The form and lineaments of a very angel of light are assumed by systems that are radically opposed to Christianity. The natural bias of the heart to religion is taken into due consideration, and to some extent provided for ; but at the same time the pride of intellect is delicately fostered. What are termed the narrow and anthropomorphic conceptions of a holy and personal God, are contrasted unfavourably with the broad and philosophical generalizations of a great First Cause, working in all things and through all things, and underlying all phenomena.<sup>9</sup> Creation is first exaggerated and mis-

<sup>9</sup> This conception of God, and the further conception intimately associated with it, "that the Power which the universe manifests to us is wholly inscrutable" (Spencer, *First Principles*, § 14, p. 46), is examined with great care and ability by Prof. Birks in his recent work, *Modern Physical Fatalism*, p. 17, seq. (Macmillan, Lond. 1876). This



represented, and then skilfully contrasted with evolution. Special providence is made to appear incompatible with law, and soon merged in the general processes of a *natura naturans* assumed to be wise in its scope and ultimately beneficent in its action. The ruin of the soul is then well-nigh complete. Its last instinctive sigh for that redemption which is still felt, through all, to be its deepest need, becomes lost in vague hopes of an endless moral progress, if not for the individual, yet for the race ; its last clinging to a proffered salvation merges in the dream of an ultimate evanescence of evil, towards which it may well be the glory of a life to have given the mite of its own transitory existence.

These are some of the characteristic thoughts and principles of that unbelief which is now working among us. This is the idealism with which modern scepticism is deluding the souls of thousands. And what is its final effect on the soul ? What but this ? Either to infuse in the soul a steady and deepening distrust in the holy realism of the facts and truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,—or, worse still, to make

volume, and the earlier volume, *The Difficulties of Belief*, ed. 2 (Macmillan, Lond. 1876), will be found extremely useful by all who enter into the modern controversy with unbelief.

it feel a vague disbelief in everything, even in any or all of the very systems that have contributed to the spiritual ruin. I have said elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and I again solemnly repeat it, this last form of unbelief, this drifting, consciously and placidly drifting, state of soul, is the greatest and gravest danger of our times. Better the paganism itself, from which our forefathers were rescued, better a belief in some powers higher than ourselves, than the selfish and frightful indifference to all belief that is now stealing into many hearts, and is the last and worst outcome of modern infidelity. Yes, we might almost say with a great Christian poet :

“ . . . Great God, I had rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn,  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that might make me less forlorn ;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,  
And hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Modern Religious Difficulties*, Serm. vi. p. 159 (Chr. Knowl. Soc., 1876). This hapless frame of mind is not wholly unrepresented in some of our popular periodical literature. The wretched “it isn’t new,” and “it isn’t true,” and “it doesn’t matter,” finds at least one clever and popular exponent that I fear greatly tends to foster, possibly quite unconsciously, the form of unbelief alluded to in the text. Unrestrained and mordant pessimism, combined with a studied suppression of everything lofty, earnest, and chivalrous, is certain gradually to pass into the lower forms of heartless and apathetic unbelief.

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth, *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, Part I. 33 (*Works*,

But enough now may have been said on the general characteristics of modern infidelity. We may now profitably pass onward to those broad and general arguments which appear to tell most heavily against it. But that portion of the subject it will obviously be best to reserve for a separate Address. Meanwhile, dear brethren, let us all pray for increased zeal, increased knowledge, and that increased love which quickens the teacher and preacher with powers not his own, and endows him with that demonstration without which all human reasoning is vain, all mere human argument is unprevailing.

Oh, blessed Spirit ! Spirit of wisdom, power, and love ! descend now in fuller measures on Thy Church, vouchsafe to us and to all who adore Thee Thy blessed gifts, help us ourselves to believe more warmly and heartily, and to bring home that belief, in all its warmth and power, to the souls of them that hear us !

vol. iii. p. 35, Lond. 1837). An elaborate criticism on the religious significance of the words quoted in the text will be found in Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, § 15, vol. i. p. 14 (Lond. 1876). The higher meaning of the passage, however, seems to have been missed by the critic.

# THE LEADING ARGUMENTS AGAINST MODERN UNBELIEF.

[DELIVERED AT DURSLEY, ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27TH,  
1876.]

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THUS far we have considered the general subject of the prevalence of sceptical thought, the causes that would seem to have led to it, and those forms of it which are now most frequent, and with which we, as God's ministers, are most likely to come in actual and practical contact.

These forms, we have seen, may be grouped under the three following heads, which, for all practical purposes, seem perfectly sufficient: First, belief in an *impersonal* Power, or Intelligence, immanent in all things, and identifiable with their totality; secondly, belief in such a Power, not necessarily immanent in and identifiable with phenomena, but separable from them, underlying them, and that of which they are

the vesture and manifestation. If to the first of these the title of Pantheism is commonly applied, for the second I ventured to suggest the title of Paratheism, as implying a sort of approach towards Theism, but yet a distinct perversion of it in its most fundamental characteristic, viz., the personality of God. The third and remaining form of unbelief I spoke of as Materialism, and as involving the denial, either directly or inferentially, of any Cause, personal or impersonal, save the unintelligent forces of nature. To this we may properly and consistently give the repulsive name of Atheism.

Having thus endeavoured fully and exactly to realize the nature and characteristics of the evil, we may now properly and logically pass onward to the consideration of the various remedies that may be provided against it, and especially of those broad and general arguments which, whether on the negative or on the positive side, appear most likely to produce an influence at the present time, and to carry with them persuasiveness and conviction. I say, broad and general arguments,—for, in the first place, it is not my object in this Address to enter into those special arguments which are more suitable for a treatise than an Address; and, in the second place, the real truth is,

that popular and prevalent unbelief does not exactly manifest itself in any one of these forms, but in a kind of loose compound of them all. What we have to contend with is, either that evil heart of unbelief which just catches up enough from the irreligious thought around it to supply an excuse for doubt in the fundamental truths of Christianity, especially on its miraculous side,—or else that still more unhappy and more utterly worldly state of mind, which considers everything as opinionable, and is too indifferent to give heed to its own real degradation.<sup>1</sup> To believe in nothing, not even in unbelief itself, is the most morally ruinous state into which any soul that Christ came to save can possibly pass,—but of this state I fear our own times are supplying us with many and terrible examples. They are to be found everywhere, and though, I trust, in modified forms, yet almost in every congregation.

<sup>1</sup> It is, I am afraid, considered by many a mark of good sense to adopt this attitude of thought. The famous but really discreditably-evasive saying, alluded to by Mr. Stephen in his recent work, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, appears at the present time not by any means to be without its influence: "What is your religion? The religion of all sensible men. And what is the religion of all sensible men? Sensible men never tell." Vol i. p. 342.

What we have then now to consider are those broad and general arguments which are likely to tell most persuasively on the other side.

I. With minds thus circumstanced, no argument probably is more likely to carry real influence with it than this,—that the truest science is now plainly taking the other side, and is unmistakably declaring *for* the truth of Theism, and *for* the belief in a Creator and moral Governor. There seems good reason for hoping and believing, that ere long, this, by the blessing of God, will be made strikingly patent. We seem on the eve of great discoveries, especially in reference to molecular physics, and those ultimate atoms which the Creator vouchsafed to call into being, and with which it would seem He vouchsafed to build up the fabric of this earth, and of the rolling worlds around it.<sup>2</sup> We seem also to have arrived at a

<sup>2</sup> From this subject, and from the results of spectroscopic observation, it seems reasonable to expect much that will place the constitution of things around us in a light that has never yet been vouchsafed to us. For references to leading treatises on this subject, see above, p. 63, note <sup>4</sup>, and add to them an important scientific paper, by the author there referred to, entitled, *The Dynamical Evidence of the Molecular Constitution of Bodies*, in the *Journal of the Chemical Society* for June, 1875.

turning-point in science. Theories in many important subjects, such, for example, as the supposed action of meteors in reference to solar heat, or the supposed constitution of the earth, a thin solid crust round a fluid nucleus of molten matter,<sup>3</sup> have been candidly given up; opinions—for they can scarcely be spoken of as

<sup>3</sup> This hypothesis, which was so generally accepted as to have almost passed out of the realm of hypotheses, was, I believe, first formally called into question by the late Mr. Hopkins, of St. Peter's College, Cambridge. His attention was first directed to the subject by the phenomena of precession and nutation. The whole subject has been recently discussed with great care and fulness by Sir William Thomson, in his opening Address to the Section of Physical Science, at Glasgow, last September. To use the words of this distinguished natural philosopher, "The state of the case is shortly this:—the hypothesis of a perfectly rigid crust containing liquid violates physics, by assuming preternaturally rigid matter, and dynamical astronomy in the solar semi-annual, and lunar fortnightly nutations; but the tidal theory has nothing to say against it. On the other hand, the tides decide against any crust flexible enough to perform the nutations correctly with a liquid interior, or as flexible as the crust must be unless of preternaturally rigid matter" (*Opening Address* as given in *The Times* for Sept. 8, 1876). When physicists differ on what would seem such a comparatively-simple question as the fluidity or non-fluidity of nearly the whole of the earth we tread on, it would seem only the commonest prudence to pause before we allow our faith to be shaken by scientific theories, which may be hereafter reversed as distinctly as the theory we have just been considering.



more than opinions—in regard of the overwhelming and almost oppressive magnitude of the realm of the visible, have undergone considerable modifications. For example, the varying brightness of the stars is no longer regarded as simply dependent on distance, varying size being now admitted to be an element that ought also to be taken into our estimates.<sup>4</sup>

Again, the ages of the world's duration, and the distance of time at which its mass became consolidated, once deemed to be vast beyond all conception, are now reduced to presumable limits that are perfectly thinkable.<sup>5</sup> Many

<sup>4</sup> See the interesting treatise of Prof. Birks, *Uncertainties of Modern Physical Science*, p. 27, seq. (Hardwicke, Lond. 1876). Herschel himself admitted that the Magellanic clouds supplied an argument against the supposition that the appearance of nebulosity is due only to supposed vastness of distance. Modern science is apparently tending to reduce greatly the almost oppressive magnitudes in which, till lately, scientific speculators always tended to indulge.

<sup>5</sup> See the *Address* of Sir William Thomson above referred to. The subject of the age of the earth is intimately connected with the rate of increase of temperature as we descend downwards from the surface. The greatest depth to which we have penetrated in these observations is hardly a single kilometre. Sir W. Thomson remarks that if any falling off of the rate of augmentation of temperature were sensible at this depth, then the whole geological history of the earth would be limited to within 10,000 years. There is, however, no reason for thinking that the rate of augmentation diminishes at so small a depth. If the geological age

other instances of silent or avowed modifications might also be mentioned, all tending to show that science is rapidly getting rid of its crudities, that it has sown, so to speak, its wild oats of speculation, and is now fast approaching a state in which, by the over-ruling wisdom of the All-wise Creator, it will be found, more than ever before, to sustain all the fundamental teaching of Revelation in reference to our race, and the beginning and end of that earth which is our present home, and the scene of our present probation. Already there are many things in modern science that seem to point to alleviations of much that at times has weighed heavily on the minds of anxious but believing inquirers. Never was there a time when the two words "Only believe" seemed more vitally necessary for us all; never a period in which we might more confidently await the developments of science, and honestly sigh that as yet they are so slow and so tentative.

All true philosophy is now postulating a beginning,—a beginning, at any rate as far as this earth is concerned, that is assuming, year

of the earth be the ninety millions of years claimed by some geologists, then a sensible diminution of the rate of augmentation would not begin till a depth of thirty kilometres was reached.

by year, more of scientific definiteness. All the views of cosmogony towards which observation is leading us, though, in several important particulars, modifications of views that were once popularly accepted by us all, are tending to bring home to us, from the realm of the outward and the material, accumulative evidence of a Personal, Holy, and Omnipotent Will, that has called us and all things into being, and loves with a boundless love all the creatures of His hand. All that our hearts have long since told us, all that stands written and revealed on the pages of the Book of Life, all that the Church of which we are members has professed as her unchanging belief,—all this, as regards the being and attributes of God, is now found traced on the unfolding pages of the Book of Nature.

We may say then, justly and correctly, that all true Science is tending distinctly to support all the fundamental statements of revealed religion in reference to the being and attributes of God,—and is even mysteriously adding confirmation to God's Word in what might otherwise have been considered its questionably specific statements as to the closing scenes of this world's history. No thoughtful observer of nature can forget how, one May evening some ten years ago, the spectroscope explained

what the telescope was then manifesting to startled observers,—and what in the sequel cool men of science did not hesitate to speak of as—a burning world.<sup>6</sup>

Such, in brief outline, is the first argument that may now fairly and persuasively be used against unbelief, especially unbelief that affects to rest on scientific discoveries. Its tenor, as we have seen, is this:—First, that several statements which, only a short time since, were considered scientifically certain, have now been modified or withdrawn; and, further, that all theosophistic speculations that were based upon them have consequently shared their fate. Secondly, that the tendency of all tested scientific discovery is now distinctly tending to support, and not, as it is alleged, to oppose the belief in a personal and omnipotent God.

<sup>6</sup> The star referred to appeared in the Corona Borealis. It was first observed on the evening of (I believe) May 16, 1866, became sensibly brighter and brighter, and then after the lapse of a few days waned in light and ultimately disappeared. The examination of the star by the spectroscope led to “the rather bold speculation” that in consequence of some vast convulsion, large quantities of hydrogen gas had been evolved, that the hydrogen had become ignited and was burning in combination with some other element, and that “the flaming gas had heated to vivid incandescence the solid matter of the photosphere.”—*Proceedings of the Astronomical Society*, vol. xv. no. 84, p. 149.

All true science is now pointing to a beginning, and to an intelligent and all-powerful Will that made that beginning, and has since taken part in its progress and development.

II. We may now notice another argument, or, rather, aggregation of arguments, which is found greatly to influence all cool and intellectual thinkers ; and it is this—that the forms of unbelief to which I alluded at the beginning of this Address, whether taken separately or in combination, utterly fail to explain, in a manner satisfactory to the reason, the origin or history of the phenomenal world around us.

Now, in illustrating this statement, one preliminary remark may be made, which, when fairly considered, will be found of really great moment in reference to the general question. The remark we desire to make is to this effect,—that every one of the forms of unbelief which we have noticed is either a plain reproduction of a form put forth long ago in the earliest days of philosophy, or else a modification or rehabilitation of it. If any one doubts this, let him take any trustworthy history of any one of the subjects we have been alluding to,—say such a work as Lange's recent history of Materialism,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (2nd ed., Leipzig und Iserlohn, 1873-1875). The concluding portion of this

—that mine out of which a learned professor, not long ago, dug out all his ore—let him take it, and, after reading its careful summaries, fairly say whether much that is now said on the subject of atoms has not often been said before, nay, even whether it was not better said by a philosophic poet nearly two thousand years ago.<sup>5</sup> Now this fact of course does not prove that the opinion or theory is the worse for such a lengthened pedigree, but it does show this, that these conceptions have been before the mind of the human race for a long time, and have utterly failed to secure more at any time than a most limited and intermittent

valuable work (Buch II. Abschn. 4) is entitled “Ethical Materialism and Religion,” and well deserves careful reading. His opinion is that much more harm is done by fanciful speculations than by downright materialism. It is less hurtful, he says, to mankind to play the part of a missionary of negation, than of an apostle of confusion (pp. 560, 561). This, however, seems open to question.

<sup>5</sup> “Of Lucretius it must be said, that he not only wrought out the doctrine of materialism with a completeness of statement and profuseness of illustration not attained by any of his predecessors, but also made his system of the universe so comprehensive that modern materialists have added absolutely nothing to his conception, but have simply confirmed at certain points, by observation and experiment, what he had reasoned out from his speculative postulates.” —*Lucretius or Paul*, p. 8,—a striking and eloquent Address by Dr. Joseph P. Thompson (Berlin, 1875).

acceptance. Nearly the same might be said of any of the other forms. They are all old friends, or rather old foes. Some have been rehabilitated, some have been cleared of weakening additions, some have been expanded into broader generalizations, but they remain, after all, every one of them, labelled with that *quod NON ab omnibus, NON ubique, et NON semper*, which all fair reasoners will admit to have some little weight in estimates of the validity of theories, as tested by the general acceptance of mankind.

There is a second remark, also of considerable weight, that may fairly be made in reference to these forms of unbelief, viz., that they are, and are felt to be, so ultimately incompatible with each other that scarcely any modern thinker cares to maintain any one of them in its separate individuality and distinctiveness. An ultimate break-down in logic or metaphysics is apprehended, and the cautious modern thinker avoids the risks of placing all his opinions on one bottom. Hence we have two modes of procedure, both of which are far from unpopular at the present time. Either some one leading form of unbelief is generally adhered to, but supplemented, where it is felt to be weak or insufficient, by elements derived

from some other form,—or a sort of general attitude of unbelief is assumed, and the principle maintained, so far as it can be called a principle, of accepting nothing that cannot be proved by observation or general experience, and of denying everything that has the faintest tinge of an *a priori* aspect. In other and more homely words, either, when a rent is made, a patch from some other garment is put on the flowing garb of unbelief, or the garb itself is discarded, and there is a relapse to primitive nakedness. Of the first course of procedure we could scarcely take a better example than is supplied to us by Mr. Mill, in his posthumous Essays on religion. The general bias of the writer is obviously to the conception of Matter and Force being eternal. But as his lucid mind saw clearly enough that this conception could not be driven through all the results of observation, without being brought into collision with some phenomena of the moral realm, and many of the clearest suggestive counter-teachings of experience, he did not hesitate to avail himself of the supplementary aid of other systems. At any rate, he very clearly indicates the possibility, if not the desirableness, of falling back upon an opinion as old at least as Zoroaster, and of conceiving, amid all the



endless storm and stress of restless Force and intractable Matter, a kind of Ormuzd, a benevolent but non-omnipotent God, who, by well-planned designs, overcomes the difficulties and passive oppositions of the matter with which he is surrounded.<sup>9</sup>

The second mode of procedure is, however, the more common, and, though I care not to use hard words, the more unworthy. It is to retire within the fortress of what is called Agnosticism, and to know nothing, believe nothing, and avow nothing, except what can be concluded and proved by experiment.<sup>1</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> Even the benevolence of the Creator is conceded by this writer with great limitations: "To jump, he says, "from this [that benevolence is one of the attributes of the Creator] to the inference that his sole or chief purposes are those of benevolence, and that the single end and aim of creation was the happiness of his creatures, is not only not justified by any evidence, but is a conclusion in opposition to such evidence as we have."—Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 192 (Lond. 1874). Cold and repulsive as this is,<sup>6</sup> it is an improvement on the view taken by Hume, in his similarly posthumous *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, who tells us that "the universe suggests to us a blind nature impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children."—*Works*, vol. ii. p. 416, seq.

<sup>1</sup> A clever, though bitter, apology for this system by Mr. Leslie Stephen, will be found in the *Fortnightly Review* for June, 1876. The definition of an Agnostic, according to

system denies the possibility of any form of *a priori* or intuitive truth, except—as has been shrewdly said—one, viz., the *a priori* truth that the system is itself right in its assertion of the incapability of knowing anything except what is proved to it, and in its maintenance of its own attitude of scepticism. This is the popular system of the present day, and by the nature of the case the most difficult to deal with in the way of direct counter-argument. At any rate it concedes to the full the statement we have made that, so far as it is concerned, no real explanation can be given of the origin or history of the phenomenal world around us. It tells us, however, thus much, that there can be no such things as miracles, because, as far as experience goes, everything seems to be obeying, and, so far as we can tell, to have ever obeyed, eternal and immutable laws. Be it so. We ask, however, and we fairly have a right to ask, what are we to think, then, of the origin of life? The first monad, the first cell, however loosely coherent and elementary, that showed within it the presence of life, was a miracle *quâ* the existing products of the mechanical or chemical forces that were then the rulers, the

this writer, is,—“one who asserts, what nobody denies, that there are limits to the sphere of human intelligence” (p. 840).

κοσμοκράτορες of all things. There was at any rate a break in the continuity here which not even that *ultimum desperatissimumque perfugium*, the possibility of which every great naturalist has denied—spontaneous generation<sup>2</sup>—will properly or adequately rectify. As we ascend upwards, and ask the increasingly difficult questions as to the first emergence of sentient and afterwards of self-conscious life,—those breaks in continuity which every system that denies the existence of God has ever found to be hopelessly inexplicable,—as we thus press home reasonable questions, we become more and more persuaded not only of the utterly helpless nature of this self-satisfied system of Agnosticism and intellectual nakedness, but even, to a certain extent, of its halting and deficient morality. For moral it can hardly be, to be so constituted as to feel that these ultimate questions are now, and always have been, the questions which the best and most cultivated of the race have ever sought to answer,—and yet otiosely to turn aside from them, on the ground that experience has not

<sup>2</sup> The whole subject of spontaneous generation will be found very fully discussed in the lucidly-written and agreeable work of Paul Janet, *Le Matérialisme Contemporain*, ch. vi. p. 94, seq. (Baillière, Paris, 1875).

supplied us, and does not supply us, with sufficient data to work upon.<sup>3</sup> Can the most charitable judgment say that such a ground is a true ground? Is it not, alas! the unconscious manifestation of what the Scripture solemnly speaks of as the evil heart of unbelief, that heart of unbelief that, sooner than give up its unbelief, will give up all its higher instincts and attributes, stifle its intuitions,

<sup>3</sup> To all who simply make experience the test, it may always be fairly said that, at any rate, the results of what in a certain sense may be spoken of as the soul-experiences of the race, and, especially, of the best and most cultivated portions of it, do demand a very careful and exact consideration. The historical origin of religion can never be put aside in alternate reasonings on the great questions now before us. If the documents we can adduce do belong to the age to which they claim to belong, and if the story they tell is such that it commends itself to the moral sensibilities as well as to the deeper and less definable longings of the truest and purest hearts, then to fall back upon *a priori* reasoning, and to refuse to investigate the evidence, is simply immoral idleness. Even in works such as Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, which might justly be cited as being marked by a far greater thoroughness than is popular at the present time, the same disinclination to face fairly the historical aspects of the question may be distinctly observed. Such a writer as the author of *Supernatural Religion* cannot be said to have neglected the historical arguments. It seems, however, now quite fair to say, after the criticism to which his work has been subjected, that he has certainly not conducted his investigation either with accuracy or completeness.

turn away from all its implanted aspirations, and wallow, almost complacently, in the mire of its own self-chosen materialism ?

The general arguments that flow from and are involved in these considerations have been felt by all sober and dispassionate thinkers to be arguments, as against any or all of these forms of unbelief, of real and practical validity.

III. One other argument to which I may briefly allude in conclusion is one that I should feel sorry to leave unnoticed, though time will fail me properly to expand it. The argument is this,—that all these systems not only utterly fail to supply any answer to the graver moral difficulties which every day's experience brings before us, but also tend to weaken or suppress our higher moral aspirations.

A very few considerations will lead us to recognize the truth of both these implied statements. Can it, for instance, be maintained for a moment that any one of these systems has thrown a single ray of light on the dark moral mysteries,—the apparently fruitless suffering, the sudden calamities, the seeming waste of moral energy,—in a word, all those sad phenomena that belong to what Scripture calls “the subjection to vanity,” and ever seem above

measure baffling and mysterious? <sup>4</sup> What has the best of these systems,—the system that admits the possibility of the existence of a God, though unknown and unknowable,—to tell us in regard to this class of deeper questions? Why, simply nothing. All that an intelligent writer of this school of thought has to tell us is simply that at present the distribution of moral forces “is hopelessly chaotic.” <sup>5</sup> But does such a statement add anything to our existing knowledge, or throw one single ray of light on the ever-recurring gloomy question? “If so, then how came it to be so?” How comes it that this Unknown and Unknowable stands in any degree of relation whatever to the admitted existence of such a strange and bewildering chaos? <sup>6</sup> Or if this Unknown stands presumably

<sup>4</sup> See the comments and references on these dark questions in *Credentials of Christianity*, Lect. vi. p. 246, seq. (Hodder and Stoughton, Lond. 1876): see also *Modern Religious Difficulties*, Sermon. ii. p. 25, seq. (Chr. Knowl. Soc., 1876).

<sup>5</sup> Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 404 (Lond. 1874). Some useful and available considerations on this subject will be found in the 10th Appendix to the recent valuable work of Paul Janet, *Les Causes Finales*, p. 742 seq. (Bailliere, Paris, 1876).

<sup>6</sup> How strange it seems that modern systems should in this matter fall greatly behind the conceptions of what, in general name at least, must be called heathenism! Hidden and unknowable as the Deity was felt to be in some of the

in no relation whatever, does not the very assumption of such an absence of all relation, such a more than Epicurean indifference to all mortal strugglings and sorrows, cast the blackness of darkness over what is night already?

O my friends! it sounds verily a keenly-refined mockery when the exponents of some of these systems tell us of the gradual evanescence of evil<sup>7</sup>—the evanescence of evil! when the

purer of the ancient religions of the world, His close relations to His creatures was always consistently maintained. For an example, compare, in the really wonderful system of Laò-tsè, his definition of the hidden nature of Taò (chap. xxv., xli.), with his statement of the close relation of Taò to all things (chap. li.) On the real meaning of this mysterious word, see the excellent introduction of Von Strauss prefixed to his translation of the *Taò te King*, p. xxxv, seq. (Leipz. 1870).

<sup>7</sup> "It is true," says Mr. Herbert Spencer, "that evil perpetually tends to disappear. In virtue of an essential principle of life this non-adaptation of an organism to its conditions [the true principle of evil, according to this writer] is ever being rectified; and modification of one or both continues until the adaptation is complete."—*Social Statics*, p. 74 (Lond. 1868). This certainly was not the experience of a very intelligent observer of life, and whose position gave him many good opportunities of judging: "When one ponders deeply," says the optimist Goethe, "on the misery of our times, it often seems as if the world were ripening more and more for the last day. Evil increases from generation to generation. For it is not enough that we suffer from the sins of our fathers; we transmit this heritage of woe to our descendants, increased

smoke of smouldering villages, the death-cries of tortured children, and the shrieks of ravished women are yet fearfully present in the eyes and ears of civilized Europe. To us Christians these things are not without their mysterious difficulties, though we know the terrible source from which they emanate. To us these things often seem dark and inexplicable,—but we know in whom we have trusted. To us this terrible presence of evil is often a soul-trying mystery,—but to those who hope in an evanescence of evil owing to the accumulating agencies of a steadily ameliorated humanity, such phenomena would seem only a mockery and bitter call—to curse their unknown God and die.

The argument from moral considerations, of which these few words are only a fleeting illustration, is the gravest and most effective of all, as against the various systems of unbelief, and especially their latest manifestations. While Christianity points through the gloom to the stars of blessed Hope that are shining above us,—these hapless systems, fairly reasoned out, lead only to Nihilism and Despair.<sup>8</sup>

by our own transgressions.”—*Conversations with Eckermann*, quoted by Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 553, p. 173 (Clark, Edinb. 1873).

<sup>8</sup> This argument will be found worked out in Sermon vi.



My address is now closed. Brief as it has been, when the nature of the subject is considered, I still hope it has been long enough to convince you, my Reverend Brethren, of the truth of these two positions:—First, that there *are* arguments, sober and reasonable arguments, against this showy and pretentious unbelief, which appeal to no other authority, and ask for no other ultimate arbiter than properly instructed good sense. Secondly, that it is our especial duty to turn our attention to them. It will be an evil day for England when England's clergy fail to be forward with the foremost in cultivation and study, and in the power to enter into these questions with competent knowledge and disciplined thought.

I fear much that there has been a tendency of late to make work and detail everything, and to suspend that thoughtful and wise study which, when entered into, not only for its own sake, but for the good, aye, the salvation, of others, ever receives the fullest and largest blessings from the Holy Ghost. It will not be enough for us in these days simply to preach truth;—we are also called upon, nay, we are pledged, to defend it. Defend it we never can

in the work above referred to, *Modern Religious Difficulties*, p. 135, seq. (Chr. Knowl. Soc., 1876).

in any proper sense, unless, with meek learning, we meet error on its own ground, and on its own ground defeat it. God in His mercy give to us strength to do so, and the ready will to tread those pathways of sequestered wisdom which, in days going or gone by, were never more patiently and successfully trodden than by the clergy of the English Church.

# THE LEADING ARGUMENTS FOR CHRISTIANITY.

[DELIVERED AT CAMPDEN, ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 30TH,  
1876.]

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In my last Address it was my endeavour to state, briefly but clearly, some of the broad and general arguments which appear to tell most heavily against the Unbelief of our own times. These, by the nature of the case, were on the negative side. They were not intended to prove the truth of Christianity, but to set forth, calmly and fairly, some of those considerations which seem to render it in the highest degree morally and logically difficult to accept any one, or any combination, of the systems which I delineated in the earlier Addresses. This being done, I may now profitably pass to the arguments which appear most calculated to influence candid minds, as on the

positive side,—those arguments which, in our own times, tend most clearly to establish and confirm our belief in the blessed truth of Christianity.

What are the chief positive arguments which, if we were suddenly asked why we are Christians, we should put forward with the fullest and clearest confidence?

Let this be the general question to which it shall be the attempt of this Address to supply a broad and general answer.

Before, however, we make the attempt, let us dwell for a moment on this preliminary thought,—that the force and, so to say, convincing power of evidential arguments appear to vary with the general tone and the general characteristics, mental and philosophical, of the age and generation in which they may be brought forward. Arguments that greatly influenced intelligent minds a hundred years ago have now, in several instances, lost much of their power, though their real evidential value seems, in the abstract, to be quite as great as ever. The argument from design may be noticed as an instance, and, still more so, the argument from the manner in which the Gospel was first propagated. The first argument may, to a certain extent, have been

neutralized in some of its more limited illustrations,—such, for example, as those derived from our bodily structure, in which structure we are told that we have to recognize traces of rudimentary or aborted organs<sup>1</sup>—“dysteleological phenomena,” as they have been called—which, it is urged, cannot be regarded as involving any manifestation of purpose. Again, the mystery of the existence of parasitical organisms,<sup>2</sup> especially in man, the

<sup>1</sup> On this subject, and on the objections urged by Häckel and other naturalists, see the comments of Ebrard in his *Apologetik*, § 76, note 1, p. 161, seq., and compare the sensible remarks of Henslow, *Evolution and Religion*, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> See Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, part iii. The general remark of his very able follower, Mr. Fiske, though perhaps too sweeping, cannot be deemed wholly unfair, viz., that “just so far as the correspondence between the organism and its environment is complete does the teleological hypothesis find apparent confirmation. Just so far as it is incomplete, does it meet with patent contradiction.”—*Cosmic Philosophy*, vol. ii. p. 405. In the case before us there is obvious design in the maturation of the entozoa in question; and the existence of animals so matured is a difficulty on the hypothesis that the development of the physical life of man is marked throughout by benevolent design. But if it be conceded that an alien disturbance, owing to the entrance of sin, has been introduced, then, though we may not be able to trace out all the subtle lines of causation in the various phenomena that may be presented to us, the supposition that they may stand in some casual connexion with that primary disturbance is perfectly thinkable. The question then re-

elaborate nature of the processes that are necessary to give them their maximum of mischievous development, and the consequent appearance of the higher life being sacrificed to the lower, are considerations which confessedly involve real and serious difficulties. The argument from design may thus have perhaps been weakened in some particulars, though the extent to which this has taken place has been greatly exaggerated;<sup>3</sup> but this certainly cannot be said of the argument that rests on the history of the Propagation of Christianity, which remains now, as far as any weakening answer is concerned, as valid in the abstract as when it was first enunciated.<sup>4</sup> And yet, though

solves into another one, Is there sufficient evidence to lead us to suppose that there has been such a primary disturbance?

<sup>3</sup> No one can give a fair consideration to such an elaborate work as Janet's *Les Causes Finales* (Paris, 1876), especially to the chapter entitled, "Objections et Difficultés" (p. 251), without feeling that much that has been said as to the decreasing power of the teleological argument must certainly be reconsidered. It does not seem too much to say that the argument is yearly becoming felt to be stronger, and that it owes that increased strength to the further considerations and investigations which have been called out by the arguments of opponents.

<sup>4</sup> There are many, and those of the highest order of mind, with whom this remains still the weightiest of the arguments in favour of the truth of Christianity. I ven-

it would be very hard to say why, it is probably not one of the three or four arguments that would weigh most with the majority of us who are now gathered together. Perhaps the distinctly pronounced bias of our own times towards arguments of an internal character—arguments that appeal to our own subjective experiences, and sometimes pass into the realm of the emotions—may have much to do with these changes in the convincing value of arguments such as those alluded to; but, however that may be, no one of any real experience in these difficult subjects can fail to have noticed, how the arguments that tell most with us now are arguments that, both for good or the reverse of it, bear the characteristics of the times in which we are living.

We might perhaps carry out the thought further, and show how the force of such arguments varies with individuals, and even with tared, two or three years ago, to address to one of our most distinguished public men, and most lucid thinkers and speakers, the inquiry as to what he deemed the most valid arguments for the truth of Christianity. He enumerated six, but the first was the argument now alluded to, and it was thus expressed: "The successful propagation of Christianity, by moral means only, and against the opposition of all the power, physical, moral, and intellectual, of the Roman Empire, until it finally prevailed over the Empire itself."

the states of mental development,—but these are refinements into which, in this short Address, we have certainly no time to enter. What has been said has only been said to prepare for, and account for, the omission of some of those arguments for the truth of Christianity which certainly might have seemed to claim, as of ancient right, a place in our present enumeration.

To confine ourselves then to those arguments which, so far as I have the power of judging, seem to have the greatest influence at the present time, I may call your attention to three on which a few practical comments may be made,—especially to you, my dear friends and brethren, who by virtue of your responsible office may from time to time have the sorrowful duty of dealing with cases of that tendency to doubt everything, and distrust everything, now so painfully increasing everywhere. A recent writer has propounded the question “Are we Christians?” and has answered it in the negative.<sup>5</sup> If we feel that

<sup>5</sup> Strauss, in his last work, *The Old Faith and the New*. This unhappy volume attracted considerable attention at the time of its appearance, but really never deserved it. The style is popular and attractive, but there is a deficiency of true moral earnestness which has always repelled deeper thinkers, to whatever school of thought they may belong.



the answer is false or, at any rate, recklessly exaggerated, let us be able not only to prove by our life and conversation that we verily are Christians, but to show also the reasons for the holy name we thankfully bear, and for the faith that is in us.

I. The first argument for the truth of Christianity, or to speak more exactly, of revealed religion, that we may now notice, is one, which some may regard of but little strength, but which, I am persuaded, does, beyond all doubt, exercise a latent, yet very seriously modifying, effect on the minds of many cultivated thinkers, especially in the earlier stages of their unbelief. The earliest stage is commonly a sort of vague persuasion that the statements of Holy Scripture in reference to the physical constitution of things around us are irreconcilable with the discoveries of modern science. This is commonly the first substratum on which that which may have been long latent in the soul rests itself as an outward support. It is alike

There is also an over-eager readiness to assume as valid scientific theories which as yet have not really passed out of the realm of plausible hypotheses. Some acute and thoroughly fair criticisms on leading statements in this volume will be found in Prebendary Row's *Principles of Modern Pantheistic Philosophy*, p. 16 (Hardwicke, Lond. 1874).

an excuse and a reason. Now it is of the utmost importance that all who may have been tempted into this initial state should know that a leading argument on the other side maintains exactly the reverse position, viz., that the broad statements of Scripture in respect of the physical history of the world are marvellously coincident with the best and most tested results of modern science. In other words, our first evidential position is substantially what the illustrious naturalist Cuvier is said to have stated long ago,—that Moses has left us a cosmogony, the exactitude of which is confirmed day by day in a very wonderful manner.<sup>6</sup>

To develop this argument would far exceed the limits of this Address, and would be inconsistent with its general purpose, which is, simply to place before you and commend to your consideration those general arguments which will be found worthy of study, with a

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Christlieb in his useful and practical tract, *Modern Infidelity and the Best Methods of Counteracting it*, p. 44 (Elliot Stock, London, 1874). The tract was read as an Address at the New York Conference of the Evangelical Alliance in 1873, and is said to have produced such an impression on those who first heard it that the writer was asked to repeat it in one of the largest churches in New York.

view to practical applications. It may, however, be briefly remarked in passing, that much that has been said in earlier portions of this Charge goes far to illustrate, if not to prove, the validity of the argument I have just specified; and it may be added that several coincidences can now be specified between the latest results of science and the broad statements of Scripture which, it does not seem too much to say, seem just now, not only opportunely, but providentially disclosed to us. I repeat the expression "broad statements," as no fair disputant would look for more than this in documents which he himself would admit were drawn up for a very different purpose than that of communicating scientific knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Now these broad statements are—First, that this world and the worlds around us were not self-caused or the result of the long-continued action of forces directed by no Intelligence, but on the contrary were made and created by an All-wise and Omnipotent God. "In the beginning God

<sup>7</sup> All impartial writers have admitted the naturalness, simplicity, and grandeur of the early portions of the Mosaic narrative. It has been justly remarked by D'Eichtal that the power of the Creator has never been more vividly portrayed than in the first chapter of Genesis. See his *Mémoire sur le Texte du premier Récit de la Création*, p. 15 (Paris, 1875).

created the heavens and the earth." Secondly, that the reduction of the primordial state of things to the present was by stages, and in a certain gradational order. Thirdly, that all this was considerably anterior to the appearance of the human race on the earth, which race was called into being separately and distinctly from other races, only a few thousand years ago.

Now, in reference to the first of these general statements, this certainly may be said, that the latest discoveries of science point to the existence of cosmical materials, strangely and marvellously similar in their ultimate nature, for the existence of which no theory of blindly-working forces can possibly account. "No theory of evolution," says the latest and best scientific authority on this subject, "can be formed to account for the similarity of molecules; for evolution necessarily implies continuous change, and the molecule is incapable of growth or decay, of generation or destruction."<sup>8</sup> If so, then who thus made them? or are we to think that they made themselves, and if so, how? Science is, at any rate, forcing all who are willing to be fair and candid to face plain questions.

<sup>8</sup> Clerk Maxwell, *Discourse on Molecules*, p. 12,—a paper read at Bradford, September, 1873: see above, p. 63, note.

There is obviously only one means of escape, and that, we may grieve to observe, men, whose high powers ought to protest against being thus suspended, are now freely adopting,—and it is this, to say that we don't know; but all who avail themselves of this subterfuge, though confessedly doing much moral harm by making a creed of their nescience, are tacitly preparing, if not to capitulate, yet at any rate to accept the inevitable. And that inevitable is year by year being brought nearer to us by tested science—that the universe is the work of an all-wise and omnipotent Will.

The second general statement, viz., that things were brought into their present state gradationally, is now so well known to be confirmed, almost in its minor details, by modern science, that I need not pause to illustrate it. So true do we now feel this to be, and so little do we now trouble ourselves about those many anxious attempts to reconcile the Mosaic narrative with the discoveries of geology, which were current five-and-twenty or thirty years ago, that it seems now almost an effort to recall either the objections or the answers. Yet there must be some of us here present who

can remember the unsparing ridicule that used to be directed against the general character of the Sacred narrative, and the triumphant assertions that were habitually made as to the total inconsistency between many of the details on the pages of the Book of Revelation, when compared with modern observation, or with the stony records of the opening book of Nature. We must remember, for example, how much was always made by our opponents of the self-contradictory nature (as it was asserted) of the statement that light was created on the first day, and the sun not till the fourth,—and now, thanks be to God, and to that scientific knowledge, which He has permitted to be acquired, there can be few who do not know how marvelously modern science is enabling us to recognize, from a due consideration of the essential nature of light, more than one way of probably accounting for the seeming difficulty and inconsistency.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The popular assertions of modern commentators either that there is no difficulty at all, or that the creation of the sun was in the beginning, but its manifestation not till the fourth day (*Speaker's Commentary*, in loc., vol. i. p. 32), must all be received with great reserve. Science tells us what light is; it also tells us that there is a vehicle of radiations, the æther, a material substance filling all the interspace between world and world, without a gap or flaw of १००००

How seriously do these things now seem to warn us all, whether theologians or men of science, to desist from the miserable strife that has so painfully marked the questions bearing upon the real or supposed relations of revelation and of science. Let us all be content earnestly, reverently, and hopefully, to seek for truth by those means which the Father of lights has vouchsafed to enable us to use. We theologians may have been far too ready to denounce as contrary to Holy Scripture that which, in the sequel, has been found still more clearly to set forth its truth. Men of science, on the other hand, have often been far too ready to

inch anywhere, and most probably penetrating through all grosser matter, the largest, most uniform, and apparently most permanent object we know. Now with these two facts before us it is possible to conceive several ways in which the statements in the two verses could be reconciled. For example, if we take our stand on the science of 1876, some may feel inclined to say that ver. 2 refers to the creation of the luminiferous æther,—the thing that appears to be most primeval and least subject to change, and that the work of the fourth day was the due adjustment of the sun to existing conditions; but as we remember that the science of 1896 may be much farther advanced in these very particulars than the science of to-day, we prefer to say that in the facts before us there is quite enough, at the very least, to suggest a reasonable and satisfactory answer, and we thank God that we can honestly say so, but we refuse further to dogmatize.

accept hypotheses, more or less probable, for established facts, and overhastily to proclaim their collision with the supposed statements of God's Holy Word. Let us cease from this unhappy antagonism, and be content, on both sides, to watch and to wait. But to proceed.

In reference to the third subject, the duration of man on the earth, and the distinctness of his origin from that of other living creatures, no one who is not prepared to enter fully into details has any right to make sweeping assertions,<sup>1</sup> but this at least may be said, that recent historical and philological research is running strangely counter to the triumphant theories of three or four years ago, and that if we will but have patience to wait, we shall find our lengthened pedigree disproved by scientific evidence, now strong, but which will probably then be simply irresistible. Time is a very easy bank to draw upon, but the calls that have been made on it by the theory of Natural Selection have brought

<sup>1</sup> See the remarks and references in *Credentials of Christianity*, Lect. vi. p. 234. These it will not be necessary here to reproduce, but they may be referred to as, at least, indicating that there is a great deal to be said on the other side. The difficulties (apparently insurmountable) in the theory of the gradual development of man from lower members of the same zoological family are noticed in the same Lecture, p. 240, seq. and notes.



about a real crisis, and have put modern theories which have to depend upon almost boundless time into serious collision with the most recent investigations in solar physics.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> If the vast periods of time which the Natural Selection theories distinctly require be considered, so far as the age of the earth is concerned (compare page 77, note <sup>5</sup>), at the disposal of modern philosophers, this very simple but obvious question suggests itself:—Would the sun at the remote epoch to which we are remanded, have come to the state which would render life, such as that of the order we are now considering, possible on the earth? That a difficulty is felt by the theorists to whom we are alluding seems certain, as in later works and editions of works in which the Natural Selection theory is maintained, the magnitude of the demands on time has been noticeably reconsidered. But if so, this is only a change which involves another and converse difficulty arising from the fact that the differences between species of which we have any sufficient knowledge in history, say 4000 years ago, when compared with the same species now, have not been found to be appreciable. Four thousand years, then, supplies, so to say, no temporal parallax. Other difficulties in which the theory of Natural Selection are involved are acutely enumerated by Prof. Birks in his *Modern Physical Fatalism*, chap. xiv. p. 290, seq. (Lond. 1876). Perhaps the most striking statement is that recently made by Mr. Carruthers (keeper of the Botanical department of the British Museum) in an Address recently delivered to the Geologists' Association. His words, as reported in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* for November 18, 1876, are as follows:—"One thing is certain that the whole testimony of the vegetable kingdom, as it is known to us from the remains preserved in the stratified rocks, is opposed to the doctrine that the development is due to evolution by descent."

II. But we must now pass to the second argument for the truth of Christianity, which will be judged by many to be the strongest that has ever yet been brought forward. It is an argument of an essentially subjective nature, as it appeals to the reason and inward experience, and it may be stated in the following form,—That Christianity is the only religion or system in the world that gives a consistent account of the moral meaning and purpose of man's existence on the earth, and supplies an adequate answer to all deeper questions. This is the great moral argument which, when fully and carefully developed, does seem to bear with it a steadily increasing and deepening conviction, and to appeal more and more strongly to the soul, in proportion as time and life's experiences are vouchsafed to us. To many—especially to those who enter much into the stirring questions of our own times—this argument is the only one on which they will be found ultimately to rest. I have myself conversed with many who have avowed to me, that whenever the vital question came really home to them, Why, then, are you a Christian? this argument, or some modification of it, was that which supplied the only satisfying answer.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The argument here specified has been worked out as

Perhaps some here present may have felt this, and may be disposed to agree with me in thinking that, to minds of an anxious and inquiring turn,—and there are many such in these days—while other arguments prepare the way, this it is which, at last, seems to minister that abiding persuadedness of mind which, by the illuminating grace of the Holy Ghost, becomes faith, living and abiding faith, in the fullest and most Scriptural sense of that vital word.

At any rate permit me to make a few comments—and they can only be comments—on the form of argument which is now before us. Stated in its most simple form it amounts to this, that whenever either or both of the very homely but very deep questions present themselves to the soul, Why am I here? and Why, being here, am I as I am? it is Christianity alone which gives answers that can in any way be considered adequate to, and commensurate with, the observed circumstances. To the first question it gives in substance this answer—“Thou art here to glorify the God who gave to

fully as I am able in the last Lecture in *The Credentials of Christianity* (Hodder and Stoughton, Lond. 1876). I have not at present found any reasons for modifying the statements and arguments in that Lecture, and so may refer the reader to it for the details of the argument specified in the text.

thee and the race to which thou belongest the breath of life ; and thou art called by the outward call of the Gospel, and the inner call of duty and conscience, frail, feeble, and fallen, as thou art, to become, through a Saviour's merits and love, a fellow-worker with God in the mighty working whereby He is subduing all things unto Himself." <sup>4</sup> To the second question, Why am I as I now am? Why are shadows and sorrows, and a seeming fruitlessness that is worse than all sorrows, about me, around me, and within me?—To this deep question, and it is confessedly the deepest that can be addressed to the heart of man, Christianity has ever returned the same answer;—"Man is as he is, because, created morally free, he yielded to an external temptation to make a perverted use of that freedom, and to swerve from a divine command; and because sin (for sin is the transgression of law) thus brought in, has spread and propagated; and endures, and must endure, in all its wide-reaching, terri-

<sup>4</sup> This answer and the scriptural considerations on which it rests will be found in an Essay on *Modern Religious Thought*, in *The Church and the Age*, p. 78—87, ed. 2 (Murray, Lond. 1869). Here, again, I have not seen any reason for modifying the general argument of the portion of the Essay referred to, so may venture to assume its results in the present Address.

ble, and yet ultimately overruled and corrective consequences.”<sup>5</sup>

Such an answer, like the answer to the first question, however else we may regard it, certainly *is* an answer, and an answer too that is perfectly clear and thinkable. It rests upon two assertions, which Scripture makes and reveals to us, and of which it can be said with perfect fairness that, when properly considered, they go very far to remove some at least of the mystery of those enigmas of life that are now seriously disquieting the hearts of many intelligent thinkers. The recognition of the first truth, viz., that man fell through the agency of an extraneous evil Will,<sup>6</sup> seems to facilitate the

<sup>5</sup> See *Credentials of Christianity*, and reff. p. 251, seq.

<sup>6</sup> The maintenance of this doctrine is that which really more distinctly differentiates true, consistent, and vital Christianity from the loose semi-Socinianism which has long been stealing into the Church. This was the truth which though in an utterly exaggerated form, and under extremely distorted aspects, was maintained in that highest and purest of the old heathen forms of religion,—the Eranian or early Persian religion,—and was the heritage that religion had received from the pure primeval faith of our earliest humanity. For an accurate account of this ancient and interesting religion, — a religion which seems to have found some favour even with Mr. Mill, (*Three Essays on Religion*, p. 116)—see Spiegel, *Eránische Alterthumskunde*, vol. ii. pp. 1—232 (Leipzig, 1873), and the translation, by the same learned writer, of the *Avesta*, 3 vols.

conception of the moral possibility of a vicarious atonement, and to prepare the way for the acceptance of the blessed truth that that Atonement has actually been made. The second truth, relating to the permanence of sin's consequences, is of no less spiritual importance. On the one hand, it often seems to lift a corner of the dark veil, and to disclose the true origin of many of the sad phenomena of mortal life. On the other hand, it often leads us to consider more closely the moral purposes to which these very consequences subserve, and how, in the mysterious providences of God, they become agencies in spiritual development, and are overruled to minister to virtue and holiness.<sup>7</sup>

The argument we are considering is of course not a direct proof of the truth of Revela-

(Leipzig, 1852—1863). The Evil Principle of the Eranian system (*Agrô Mainyus*) was regarded as eternal *a parte ante*, and a creator of the other powers of darkness, but is ultimately to be destroyed. Spiegel, *op. cit.*, vol. ii. p. 122, seq.

<sup>7</sup> It is proper to notice that a teaching of the permanence of consequences is distinctly to be recognized in the writings of all the better exponents of what we have termed (see p. 51) the Paratheistic school of thought: see *Credentials of Christianity*, p. 261. The principle is, in fact, involved in the very theory of Evolution, and, in the writers referred to, is not evaded by any of the subterfuges of that immoral optimism which so seriously marks the lower non-religious thought of the present time.

tion, but it is one of those arguments which increase in cogency the further we investigate. The more closely we examine the answers that have been attempted to the two broad questions which have been already enunciated, the more clearly we see, either that they do not cover the phenomena, or that they appear inadmissible to the moral consciousness. For example, the old dualistic theory of the two Principles, or the theory which has been revived by Mr. Mill of a non-Omnipotent God, will, either of them, go far in accounting for very many of the moral phenomena which surround us; but both of them are so utterly opposed to our innermost moral conviction that God must be free, and never could have been thus hindered and restrained from all eternity, that when we put on such arguments only the most moderate strain, they break under us at once. Again, the more closely we search into the deepest convictions of our souls, the more distinctly shall we find that the conception of a primal lapse commends itself to our belief, and the more adequate will the Christian answer seem to be, when confronted with the actual experiences and phenomena of life. Under both aspects the argument will be felt to be progressive in its cogency, and to deserve the high place that

modern thought assigns to it among the great evidential arguments of our own time.

III. We must not, however, forget the third argument, that argument which seems, if we might so characterize it, the most completely heart-argument of all the arguments for Christianity that have ever yet been put forward. Our reason acknowledges the force of the arguments already specified, but our very soul does feel the force of that argument which rests on the correlative nature of Christianity to all the higher aspirations and deepest needs of the human heart.<sup>8</sup> What is the heart's highest aspiration? Is it not that deep and mysterious yearning which will be found in the background of every heart, that yearning which discloses itself in the absorption theories of Oriental creeds, and even is traceable in the very Nirvâna of Buddhist philosophy,—the yearning to become one with Him who called us into being, and to abide with Him for ever? What is the heart's deepest need? Is it not that which no religion save one has ever even attempted to reveal? Is it not Salvation,—that, for which, in every age and every race,

<sup>8</sup> This argument has been carefully treated by Dr. Lorimer in the volume already several times referred to, *Credentials of Christianity*, Lect. v., pp. 183—220.



the soul has sighed, which has been sought for, passionately sought for, and, save in the Christian Creed, never, never found?

And if this be so, does not that religion which reveals, developes, and points to the realization of this aspiration, and the satisfaction of that need,—does not the religion which discloses to us a personal God, and reveals to us a Redeemer and a Saviour, appeal to us with a force and a power which every experience of life seems to render stronger and stronger? There may be difficulties, but we heed them not. There may be questions which we cannot answer, but when we have found Him, we know that we have found the solution of all. There may be dark enigmas in life which we may feel we can never understand on this side the grave, but when we can realize that redemption has verily been vouchsafed to us, all these things are but the shadows that enhance the light, and make us only long more and more for the fulness of the day.

Of all the arguments for the truth of Christianity, this perhaps is of the widest and most practical influence. To thousands and tens of thousands it is the only argument that bears ultimate conviction; “I know in whom I have trusted” is the one answer that experience

shows has never lost its force. It is as inwardly convincing now as it was in the days of Tertullian. It is the *testimonium animæ* which no cross-examination, however clever and baffling, has ever been found to perplex or invalidate.

Of course, we know well that it can be urged, and quite fairly urged, that this is an argument which will be found to carry little or no conviction, except to those who are partially convinced already. Still, the fact that Christianity *does* reveal that for which experience shows there is a distinct longing in the inconceivably vast majority of human hearts,—that it does so clearly and distinctly,—that it has done so from the very first, and that in doing so it has helped to form a steady succession of the highest, noblest, and purest characters the world has ever known; this fact cannot be denied, and forms a presumption in favour of the truth of Christianity to which no other systems can, in the remotest degree, supply a parallel.

There are other arguments, as I have already implied, one of the most practical of which is that which is reflexively suggested by our own irrepressible conviction as to the endurance of our personality, that “impassioned anxiety”

of the soul, as a modern writer has called it, relative to a future state, which is ever found to be so closely united with the belief in the personality of God,<sup>9</sup> that they who do not accept the latter truth are never able consistently to advocate the former. Other arguments there are, but on this occasion it has been my care only to place before you those which seem to appeal to us most cogently at the present

<sup>9</sup> In speaking of the question of a future life, Caro justly observes, "C'est encore sous une autre forme, le problème qui nous a déjà occupé, celui de la personnalité de Dieu, idéal de l'individualité humaine et garant suprême de la persistance de notre être dans le monde inconnu que la mort ouvre devant nous. La question de la vie future dépend de celle-ci ; Dieu n'est-il que l'ordre abstrait des choses, ou bien en est-il le Principe intelligent ? Dieu est-il la force aveugle ou le Dieu moral, le juge et le père de genre humain."—*L'Idée de Dieu*, chap. vi. 1, p. 270, seq., ed. 4 (Hachette, Paris, 1873). Even in such a really wonderful system as that of Laò-tsè, in which as Von Strauss rightly remarks we seem to have a kind of residuum of the old and primæval Monotheism (*Taò-te-king*, Einleitung, § 30, comp. § 12) we see this principle exemplified. Taò was unknown and unknowable ; the utmost then that could be said of the individual after death was that "he returned back to his Light," and "put on eternity." The conception of the endurance of the personality fades away as the true monotheistic idea fades into that of the Hidden and the Unknown. The two doctrines are intimately connected. Given the one, and the other logically seems to follow. See the difficult and very striking chapter, No. lii., in the edition of Von Strauss, p. 229, seq.

time, and the force of which is admitted by every candid opponent. These arguments I have only stated briefly, and in their general scope and outline, but for those to whom I am speaking quite enough may have been said to suggest principles of evidential reasoning, which will never be found to fail them in the time of trial.

I must now close this Address, yet I must not fail to advert, however briefly, to one other great evidential argument, which has perhaps produced but little less effect than the argument to which I have last alluded, and to which it is closely allied—the practical argument afforded by a really religious life. If we would really convince others, this will often work a conviction when all words and arguments may fail. O my brethren, this is the argument that we, of all men, ought to pray to God for grace to set forth with all fulness and clearness of manifestation. We, who would convert and save the souls of others, must show forth the blessed workings of those saving and converting powers in our own souls and spirits, or all our labour will be sadly and seriously in vain. God alone can know the terrible potency of that argument against Christianity which is tacitly supplied by an unspiritual life, in the

case of those who profess to believe in Christ, and, still more, in the case of those who have declared that they felt inwardly called to preach His holy and soul-saving Gospel.

If, then, we feel persuaded that there is now much unbelief about us and around us, O let this persuasion move us, all the more earnestly and the more solemnly, to pray for grace to live up to that high standard we preach, and to follow more closely the footsteps of that most holy Life which we set forth as the Life and Light of the world, that Life which, both in its course and its close, is the one fountain of redemption for all men.

O blessed Saviour, give to us, and to all thy Church, grace to love Thee more, and to walk more closely with Thee, and ourselves to become living arguments of the truth of thy Gospel, and to bear that witness which Thou dost ever bless and make convincing,—the witness of a simple, holy, pure, and consistent life.

# BEST METHODS OF DEALING WITH UNBELIEF.

[DELIVERED AT STOW-ON-THE-WOLD, ON TUESDAY,  
OCTOBER 31ST, 1876.]

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I HAVE now come to the last portion of the important subject on which I have been dwelling in the present Charge. In the preceding Addresses I have spoken of the nature of existing Unbelief, and the most convincing arguments against it; in this concluding portion I must endeavour to place before you a few considerations as to the feelings with which we ought to be animated, and the general principles on which we ought to bear our part in the great controversy. This portion is not of less importance than any of those that have preceded it; nay, it is of more importance, as it involves this really momentous question to each one of us,—If unbelief is now spreading silently, and

everywhere, and if its general characteristics are what have been described, how can it best be met by us in our general teaching?

It shall be my care to answer this question as well as I am able in the present Address.

To do so in the clearest manner, I must again call attention to that which former considerations have led us to deem the most prevalent form of unbelief. This, in its most dangerous aspects, and in those aspects in which we, as ministers of the Gospel, shall probably most be brought in contact with it, is the increasing tendency to believe nothing except what can be definitely proved, and to regard everything else as opinionable. This form of unbelief, whether we call it Agnosticism or Nescience, or by whatever name we may define it, is the form which, under various disguises, will most frequently present itself to us in our general ministrations; and it is this form which we may now consider as more particularly before us, while we seek to consider how we may best countervail its dangerous and dreadful influences.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The sort of mood of mind here alluded to has been briefly, but very clearly, set forth by a recent writer as expressing itself in the following words: "Probably there is a God; and if God exists, it is quite within the limits of possibility that He might vouchsafe His reasonable creatures

Many will perhaps feel disposed to supersede the whole inquiry by taking the position now taken by all those who rest principally on authority and dogmatic tradition, and by simply standing apart from the whole controversy. As true Churchmen, it is said, we have really nothing to do with these miserable aberrancies of modern thought. Heresies and heretical opinions, it is urged, there have been from the very first, and there will continue to be to the very end of time. They appear quickly, pass into new forms, and soon become lost amid those really mighty antichristian forces which are ever putting forth their energies against the militant Church, and of which this unbelief and these passing heresies are only the transitory manifestations. It is against these great forces, it is against our known and recognized enemies, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, that the Church must exclusively contend. These ephemeral opinions, it is said, if dealt with at all, must be dealt with by authoritative declarations of the truth; simple and faithful

a revelation; at the same time it is more likely than unlikely that no revelation should be given, and it is nearly certain that no revelation has been given to men."—*In Quest of a Creed*, p. 15 (Elliot Stock, Lond. 1876). This agreeable volume is, I am glad to be able to mention, written by an incumbent of the diocese of Gloucester and Bristol.



enunciation of that form of sound words which came down to us from the Apostolic Church is the true remedy for prevalent scepticism ; the clear voice of authority is that which is really needed. Let the Church only set forth the truth, and error will soon lose its power and attractiveness.

Such expressions, my brethren, are, I fear, often heard at the present time ; and, what is worse, acted upon. It is ever flattering to our self-love to feel that we may properly stand apart from all these controversies, and that our office and mission is not to argue but to teach. It is ever congenial to the mental slothfulness that is too often allied with trust in authority to persuade ourselves that arguments and evidences never ultimately convince,—nay, that they are often precarious and dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Such, however, is not the view taken by earnest men of science. Modern materialism, especially, has been felt to be what it truly is, and has been spoken of in tones of seriousness by those best qualified to give an opinion, which may read a salutary lesson to many who think that modern unbelief is only a kind of scare which will soon pass away or yield to mere dogmatic denunciation. Speaking of materialism “as regarding the world as the fortuitous result of the arrangement of atoms, man as the highest term of the natural evolution of organic forms, life as the spontaneous modification of force, birth as the beginning of a phenomenon, death as its end,” the distinguished

There are, also, only too many subtle reasons at the present time why such a mode of dealing with unbelief should be welcome and attractive ; but we, dear brethren, who really love the Truth, know well that it is by no such principles that we shall bring that Truth home to the hearts of the doubting and the wandering. This is not that returning an answer,—the answer of meekness and reverence,—which an Apostle has bidden us ever to have ready for those that ask for the reason of the hope that is in us. This is not that active driving away of error to which we stand pledged by the vows which we made at our Ordination. No, our duty, especially at this critical time, is to prepare ourselves to bear our part earnestly and bravely in the dread controversy that is hourly deepening around us,—whether there is verily a Father and a God, a Father who so loved us that He gave His only Son for us, or whether there is nothing in this fair world

chemist, Prof. Dumas, recently used these remarkable words in the Hall of the French Institute. “When,” he said, “in consequence of this lamentable philosophy, justice is only a social convention, conscience a product of education, charity, friendship, love, various forms of egotism, whoever has charge of souls can no longer pass by the side of science, turning away the head and saying, What matter those things to me?”—*Speech on Aug. de la Rive*, cited in the *Edinburgh Review* for Jan. 1875, p. 200.

around us, nothing in the starry heavens above us, but either the ceaseless play of cosmic forces, that ever have been and ever will be, the eternal rhythm, as it has been said, of evolution and dissolution, of concentration of matter and dissipation of motion, and again of diffusion of matter and absorption of motion,—either this, or the dreaming movements of unconscious Intelligence. This is the controversy, and we must bear our part in it; but how?

I. First, with a feeling of cheerfulness and confidence. There never was a time when there was more reason for hope and reassurance than at the present. Never has the little flock had less reason to fear than now. Already we can enumerate marvellous confirmations of the truth of Scripture and Scripture's fundamental doctrines, that far exceed any that in any former age have been vouchsafed to the teaching Church. Already science, history, and literary research are bearing their tributes to Christian truth, and opening their treasures as they have never opened them before. What now does every competent observer of nature tell us he sees written on its unfolding pages? "Let us fearlessly trace the dependence of link on link of organic life," says one of our greatest

physical philosophers now living, “but let us take heed that in thus studying second causes, we forget not the First Cause, nor shut our eyes to the wonderful proofs of design which in the study of organized beings”—especially mark these words, brethren—“meet us at every step.”<sup>3</sup> “Overwhelmingly strong proofs,”—this is very unqualified language,—“overwhelmingly strong proofs,” says another equally great physical philosopher, “of intelligent and benevolent design lie around us;”<sup>4</sup> and, as if our very adversaries could not now honourably keep silence, in reference to the accumulated evidences of purpose, we have now in a single volume, that has probably produced more effect in Germany, on younger minds, than any similar work of our own times,—I mean the melancholy treatise of Edward von Hartmann on the Unconscious;<sup>5</sup>—not con-

<sup>3</sup> Professor Stokes in his *Address* as President of the British Association in 1869.

<sup>4</sup> Sir William Thomson in his *Address* as President of the British Association for 1871. I am indebted for both this and the preceding quotation to the valuable *Address* of another distinguished man of science, Mr. Main of Oxford, viz. *Modern Philosophic Scepticism examined*, p. 22, ed. 9 (Hardwicke, Lond. 1876).

<sup>5</sup> This writer, though young (he was born at Berlin in 1842), has attracted considerable attention by his *Philosophie des Ueberwussten*, a thick volume of 850 pages, which

cessions merely as to the existence of evidences of design, but lucid and convincing illustrations of it, which make the unhappy volume one of the most useful repertories of teleological facts and arguments that has appeared for the last twenty years. No, let no one's heart fail him as to true science. Far, far from its being opposed to us, it is now supplying such accumulative evidence of the presence of Him whom a late exponent of science fittingly spoke of in his presidential chair as the Supreme Author and Upholder of the Universe,<sup>6</sup> that we may bow our heads with thankfulness and adoration, and trace only another of those has already passed through more than six stereotype editions. It has not inaptly been called the "Philosophy of Despair," but is curiously useful in the vast amount of evidence accumulated as to the presence of design in nature. For a brief account of this writer and his principles, see *Westminster Review* for Jan. 1876, and compare *Credentials of Christianity*, p. 269. Though we may not care to use the strong language of Cardinal Rauscher, who denounced Hartmann, in an address to his clergy, as the "very soul of the party of impiety," we may yet feel that there are few who have done more harm to the younger men in Germany than this clear but most hopeless speculator. His later writings are marked by an exaggerated and pretentious tone which perhaps may indicate that his influence is waning.

<sup>6</sup> Professor Andrews, in his presidential *Address* at Glasgow to the British Association, Sept., 1876, as given in *The Times* for Sept. 7, 1876.

mystic lines of ever-present working whereby God is subduing all things to Himself.

What I have said of science might be said with equal force in reference to history and archæological literature. In reference to the latter, no competently-informed person can fail to admit that all evidence is pointing to an aboriginal oneness of language,<sup>7</sup> and so to that primal unity of our race which of late has been sweepingly and even pugnaciously denied,—and yet, as it would seem, in the teeth of evidence, that at any rate (as concerns our descent from apes) was judged, three or four years ago, by a large majority of assembled men of science, at a meeting at Stuttgart, to be both sufficient and conclusive.<sup>8</sup> And if lin-

<sup>7</sup> Recent philology, and especially works that particularly treat of this question, such as Reinisch, *Einheitliche Ursprung der Sprache* (Wien, 1874), seem to justify this remark. Prof. Huxley, not unnaturally, regards this sort of evidence with but moderate favour; he, however, admits that “in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, unity of language may afford a certain presumption in favour of unity of the stock of the people speaking those languages.” —*Critiques and Addresses* (Lond. 1873).

<sup>8</sup> Stated on the authority of Christlieb, *Modern Infidelity*, p. 47. The opinions of Carl Vogt were successfully met by Virchow and others at the head, it is stated, of a large majority. The Conference was held in the autumn of 1873. I have not, however, been able to procure an account of what actually took place.

guistic research is with us, what may we not say of history and archæology? Not only have later portions of the Old Testament received the most varied and striking confirmations from the records of early history, Babylonian and Assyrian, that have lately been deciphered, but even the early ethnology of Scripture, so often called into question, has at length been all but demonstrated to be accurate and true.<sup>9</sup> Nay more, the very history of creation itself has been shown to be, to say the very least, in harmony and coincidence, almost literal and verbal, with documents that now disclose to us independently the immemorial traditions and belief of one of the oldest of the families of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

II. Secondly, whenever we may be called upon to enter into these questions it must not only be with confidence, but with a soul that yearns for the change and conversion of each doubting heart, with which it may happen to be brought in contact. This is the true method. Without that deep desire in our

<sup>9</sup> See the valuable Lecture of Prof. Rawlinson on "The Alleged Difficulties of the Old and New Testament," in *Modern Scepticism*, p. 268, seq. (Lond. 1871).

<sup>1</sup> See the note and ref. in *Credentials of Christianity*, p. 236. The document there referred to has been published.

souls our arguments will have but little of really persuasive influence. Without sympathy our reasoning will never produce any lasting effect. "Sympathy!"—some one perhaps will say! "O much misused word! How is it possible to feel sympathy towards men who are now not only using great powers of mind, and positions of considerable influence, in undermining the belief in revealed religion, but are frequently using a language of bitterness and contempt which may remind us that aversion to those who differ from us is not strictly limited to Theologians?"

"Is not sympathy in such cases almost a disloyalty towards the Lord who has redeemed us?" No, I venture to answer, it is not. Everything that tends to set forth love for souls can never be otherwise than well pleasing to Him. And to whom may that feeling more fitly be manifested than towards those who, in all the sad meaning of the words, are alone in the wide world without a Father and a God! Unbelief, however boldly it may speak, is ever at heart unsatisfied and unhappy. There is a void in the soul that never can be filled save with the love and the knowledge of Christ. When we see men like Mill gazing into the rayless night, and striving with every mental



power, to find out if poor human philosophy can minister to them any presumption for another life,—any hope of reunion with those loved as their own lives, who have passed into that night and now, it may be, are not—when we see this, we forget all their hard sayings, and seek only to bring home the love and Fatherhood of Him who is as yet to them the Unknown God. Verily we must teach with tenderness and sympathy, if we would ever aspire to the blessed and holy hope of bringing back the wanderers to that Lord, from whom the pride of human knowledge and the unbelief of the poor natural heart of man have, for the present, severed them.

But if we must speak and teach with sympathy, so also must we never fail, especially in helping and guiding others who may require our spiritual assistance, or generally in setting forth the truth to those committed to our charge, to set forth that truth with humility and candour.

It will be ill for us to forget that there *are* difficulties, in reference to some points of Christian doctrine, which are acutely felt by many earnest and sensitive hearts at the present time. All those questions that relate to what may be termed the 'Theodicy, or in more

general terms, God's moral and providential government of the world,<sup>2</sup> all those dark dispensations, which seem to make us think of God as a hidden God, the possibility of evil working the ruin it often does work among the apparently innocent, and all the dread questions connected with evil and its issues in the world to come—all these questions are now trying the faith of thousands, and if dealt with at all must be dealt with in a spirit of gentle-

<sup>2</sup> See some further comments on this subject in *Credentials of Christianity*, Lect. vi. p. 254. The three considerations there mentioned, viz., the lapse of a prior order of beings, the aspect under which the present constitution of things may be regarded, and (so far as we may humbly presume to trace it) the final purpose of God in His dealings with mankind, will perhaps be found to supply some alleviating thoughts to those who feel (as thousands do) difficulties, general or defined, in reference to these profound subjects. Though it may be sometimes our duty reverently to seek for such light as God's Holy Word and the deductions that flow from it may be found to supply, yet that attitude of mind is far, far better and safer than seeks no solution of that which, in the present state of our knowledge and faculties, may really be insoluble, but simply trusts, believes, and adores. Most truly has it been said, "Ista omnem humanam facultatem excedunt, nec ad investigandum iudicium divinum ulla ratio prævalet vel disputatio."—*De Imitatione Christi*, Book iii. ch. 58,—a chapter very well worth taking to heart. The old advice is the true advice,—“Hoc magis satage et intende, ut vel minimus in regno Dei queas inveniri.”—*Ib.* § 7.

ness and sympathy. The hard and dogmatic tone in which these subjects are sometimes dealt with in the Christian pulpit, or what is worse, the superficial and conventional arguments with which so-called difficulties are disposed of in the popular address, often do harm to anxious minds, especially in the case of the young and the sensitive, that no words can exaggerate. It is felt that the real difficulties are *not* fairly stated, that they are *not* entered into with that wise sympathy, which, in times like our own, is so vitally necessary, and that argument, only too often, passes into mere censure and denunciations.

The result is, that a reactionary feeling is often called out,—and minds that, at one period of their trials, might have been powerfully influenced by the blessed truths of the Gospel, and easily led, if a gentle and sympathetic form of teaching had been adopted, become alienated and antagonized, and then the lapse is, alas! only too easy and natural. Wounded and alienated, they soon pass from the sad realm of doubt and difficulty into the still sadder realm of utter scepticism and unbelief. They commonly first fall easy victims either to the milder forms of the pleasant and popular agnosticism of the day, or to that most

plausible and most perilous persuasion that morality is really the *essentia* of religion, and that Christianity, after all, is nothing more than its purest manifestation.<sup>3</sup> The gradual transition from this to definite doubt in the fatherhood and even the existence of God, becomes very easy,—and then succeeds that state which I have persistently maintained in this Charge to be the saddest and worst of all,—a state into which, I fear, many more are passing than we are at all aware of,—a state in which nothing is believed, not even unbelief itself,—a state in which everything, save perhaps a few vague outlines of morality, is regarded as uncertain and opinionable. Definitely formulated disbelief I fear not; for of this I am persuaded that, with the light that is now breaking around us, no candid and intelligent mind can—at any rate in this Christian

<sup>3</sup> Even this is now denied. Such writers as Hartmann do not hesitate to condemn even the very morality of Christianity. No morality, according to this writer, which is founded on, what he terms, “blind obedience to another’s will can be other than ‘heteronomy.’” Moral autonomy, we are told, is the only true form of morality, the only trustworthy principle on which we can safely rely. It is refreshing to turn aside from these really shallow conceptions to such an estimate and comparison as that placed before us by Prof. Mozley, *Sermons*, p. 65, seq., ed. 2 (Lond. 1876.)

land—long remain at rest in it. The very varied and even opposed forms in which current unbelief is showing itself are so many indirect evidences of the inherent weakness of every system which has yet been formulated. I fear it not; and I have given, I trust, in this Charge reasons for such a statement; but I do fear that dishonest, slothful, and immoral doubting as to everything,<sup>4</sup> that quintessence of the world and of worldliness, that verily is,—and involves all that can be involved in the dreadful words,—ignorance of, and then, by natural consequence, enmity with God.

This is the real danger of our own times. It is a danger that is especially great in the case of those who may have much cultivation, but little of real life experience. It is the danger that is threatening our younger people,

<sup>4</sup> The baneful effect of this state of mind on the whole moral nature cannot be overestimated. All that is really natural, the wistful curiosity, the not unwelcome feeling of awe, the sensibility to the glory of nature,—all those mysterious feelings which (as have recently been shown with admirable power and truth) are the sort of inward witnesses to Him who is invisible, are rudely brushed aside or damped off by this agnosticism. If the reader would desire really to feel the truth of what is here said, let him read carefully Mill's Essay on "Nature" (*Three Essays on Religion*, p. 3, seq. and then read as carefully Dr. Mozley's sermon on the same subject (*Sermons*, p. 122, seq.), and he will realize more than can be set forth in many words.

against which openness and sympathy on our part will do much to protect them.

But if candour and sympathy are needed, so also is competent learning and knowledge. We the clergy must never fall behind the laity in reference to the questions and difficulties of our own times. It would be an evil day for the Church of England if the large central body of its pastors and teachers, either from love of ease or from an unseasonable indifference, were simply to content themselves with teaching and preaching a flawless orthodoxy, often more ecclesiastical than biblical, and were to take no heed of the various aspects under which unbelief is now showing itself in all grades and classes of Christian society. The householder must bring forth out of his treasures things new and old. There must be, and there ought to be among us, a competent knowledge of the really vital questions of the day; for though our general congregations may know little and care little about the various systems of sceptical philosophy which I have delineated in other portions of this Charge, and may have very little sympathy with unbelief in any of its many Protean forms, yet there is an evil atmosphere around us, a sort of *aeris lues* by which doubt seems everywhere strangely spreading

and propagating, and, as many of you know from the harmful publications now I fear circulated in many parishes, affecting those classes that once were free from it.<sup>5</sup> Is not then our duty plain? Must we not, my brethren, if we would be true physicians of the soul, at least take some account and acquire some knowledge of the prevalent forms of disease? But how? This question, I rejoice to feel, can readily be answered. There is now, thank God, no difficulty in acquiring that knowledge. Through the wisdom and energy of the venerable Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, and the successful labours of the Christian Evidence Society and of the Victoria Institute, a series of books and treatises have been produced, in the last few years, which will be found to supply nearly all the information that could be needed, and will set before the reader the more

<sup>5</sup> I am told by those on whom I can depend that bundles of papers containing matter opposed to religion, as well as to social organization, are sent down weekly by railway to prearranged country stations, and are thence disseminated by local agents in the neighbouring country parishes. There are certainly signs, which I have noted for some little time, which independently confirm this unwelcome fact—that disbelief is being silently propagated among the least-educated classes of the community, and is beginning to show its presence where we should least expect to find it.

valid and tested answers to the various forms of modern unbelief.<sup>6</sup>

With this knowledge and above all, with a full, accurate, and critical knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, there is no one among us who may not bear his part usefully and effectively in the great controversy. Never was a really accurate knowledge of the Holy Scriptures more needed than at present;<sup>7</sup> never a time in which it was more vitally necessary to distin-

<sup>6</sup> The thoughtful student will also be wise not to neglect the study of ancient religions; some of which, as for example the Zend religion, and the striking system of Laò-tsè, will be found not only psychologically interesting, but often very deeply suggestive. The more steadily we study these ancient religions, in their earliest forms and purest sources, the more does the great truth, advocated now by many (see, in this respect, Mr. Fairbairn's recent work, *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion and History*, Lond. 1876), stand forth that there was a time when all worshipped one supreme God and Father of all. See Von Strauss, *Introduction to Translation of Laò-Tsè*, p. xli.

<sup>7</sup> I fear it cannot be said that we have this accurate knowledge. There are very unwelcome signs, now often recurring, that in the hurry and bustle that marks so much of recent Church work, the thoughtful and critical study of the Scriptures is becoming increasingly neglected. It is now unhappily not uncommon to find letters in our religious newspapers complaining of the misapplication of texts in the public utterances of those who occupy responsible positions. There is one such in one of our leading Church papers this very week in which this note is written. Mere work is not everything.



guish between that which is primary, essential, and fundamental, biblical truth, and that which belongs to what has been termed the dogmatic formulation of it. "How true is it," to use the words of a wise writer of our own times, "that often while men imagine that they are contending for Revelation, they are, in fact, contending for their own interpretation of Revelation, unconsciously adapted to what they believe to be rationally probable."<sup>8</sup> How often, even in our own days, have really great scientific discoveries been denounced as contrary to Scripture, when, in the sequel, they have not only been found to be true, but to have materially aided, as true science ever does aid, in setting forth the power and the wisdom of God.<sup>9</sup> He would perhaps be a bold man who

<sup>8</sup> Whewell, *History of Inductive Sciences*, Book v. 3. 4, vol. i. p. 311 (ed. 3, Lond. 1867).

<sup>9</sup> Few things do more real harm than the "small science" we find in popular commentaries on Genesis, even when the work of reputable writers. Still worse is it with what are called Scriptural cosmogonies, or the many well-meant but very hazardous reconciliations of the Mosaic narrative with science. The truth commonly is that even if such writers have had a scientific education, which is certainly not always the case, the pace at which science is now moving is too quick for them. The theories of the year that is passing may be, and often are, superseded by the discoveries of the year that follows, and Theology be-

would undertake, before a mixed religious audience, to maintain any of the broader principles of the doctrine of Evolution ; and yet,—when experimental science teaches us by the spectroscope that, as was said a few weeks ago by the Chairman of the British Association, “The mighty universe is chiefly built up of the same materials as the globe we inhabit,”—why may not the All-wise Creator have vouchsafed to form existing classes and orders of animal and vegetable life out of a comparatively limited number of typical forms ; and why may not the earth and the waters have thus obeyed the great creative command which Holy Scripture tells us God vouchsafed to address to them ? At any rate we cannot but regard it as highly suggestive that the sacred narrative represents the Creator, in two cases at least, as issuing forth His divine commands to the realms of nature, to the seas and the earth, that were to be the future home of the living creatures which were called forth from their productive wombs.<sup>1</sup> But I must not now

comes clogged with antiquated and presumably incorrect explanations ; and so the truth greatly suffers. Let us use science by all means, but let us take care that it is *verified* science.

<sup>1</sup> It would be very unwise to press this, but the language is certainly remarkable and suggestive. Nearly all the

pause on these details. Let it suffice for me to urge in these closing words a really faithful and intelligent study of the Holy Scriptures, and especially with reference to modern controversies and scepticism. The more fully we realize that Book to be what it is, the History of Salvation, the more firm will become our own faith, the more deep our impression on the souls of those that hear us. If we would really convince, we must touch the heart and the conscience, awaken the sense of need and longing, and then show where and how, and where and how alone, that need and that longing can be satisfied. When sin is felt to be what it is, doubt is over. The whole mighty struggle between belief and unbelief is centred in the conviction as against the non-conviction of sin.

May God give us grace to feel this ourselves, and to help others to feel it. This is our work,—this our duty in the great and deepening controversy. Human knowledge will, if

older interpreters notice it. Ambrose more than once alludes to the productive and germinative power imparted by God to the waters and to the earth. Of the water he says, “*Venit mandatum et subito aqua jussos fundebatur in partus, generare fluvii, vivificare lacus, mare ipsum cepit diversa reptilium genera parturire, et secundum genus effundere quodcumque formaverat.*”—*Hexameron*, v. 1, vol. i. p. 79, ed. Bened. (Paris, 1686).

blessed by God, not be without its use, but the knowledge we must have, if we would convince the doubting and convert the gainsaying, is all summed up in one word, Christ,—Christ crucified and atoning for the sins of a lost, fallen, and suffering world.

THE END.

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